THE SUNKEN BELL

BY

GERHART HAUPTMANN

ENGLISH VERSION BY

CHARLES HENRY MELTZER

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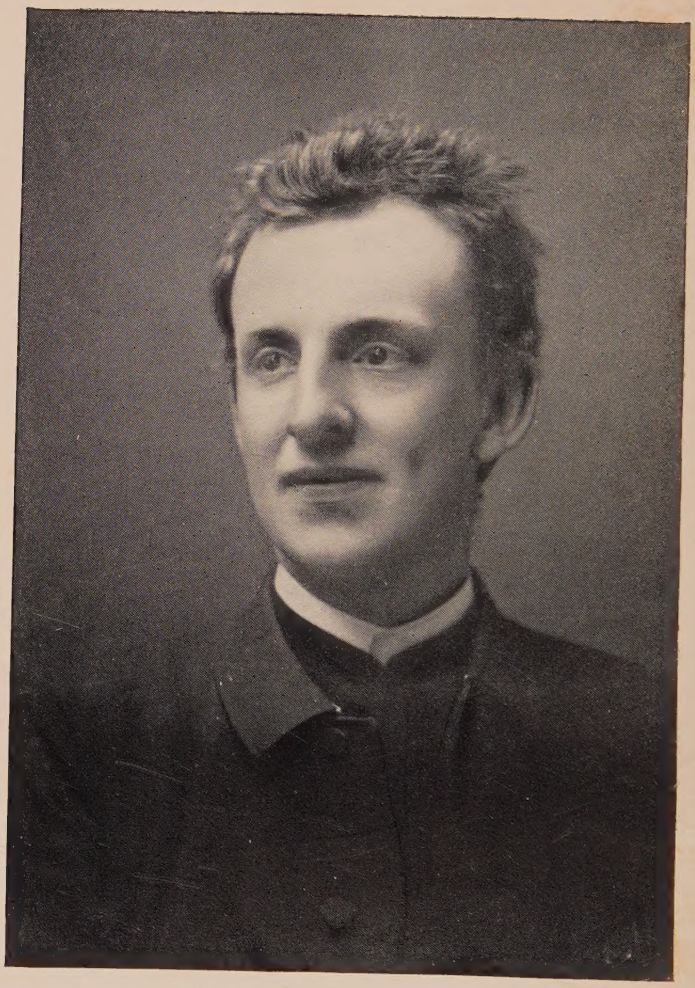
2616
.Z37M4
1900

THE SUNKEN BELL



Gerhart Hauptmann.

THE SUNKEN BELL

A FAIRY PLAY
IN FIVE ACTS

BY

GERHART HAUPTMANN

FREELY RENDERED
INTO ENGLISH VERSE

BY

CHARLES HENRY MELTZER

NEW YORK
DOUBLEDAY & McCLURE CO.
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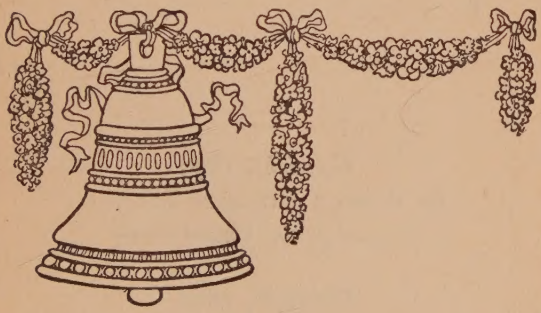

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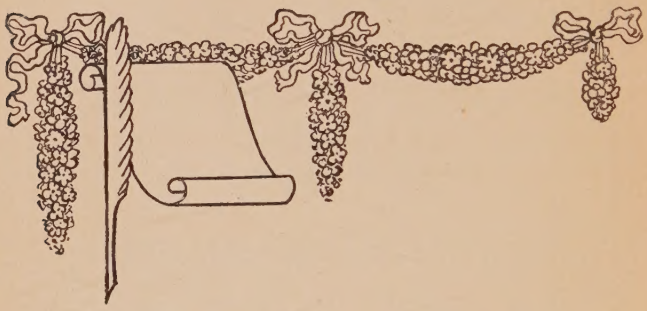

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in einer merkwürdigen Übereinstimmung Ihrer und meiner Gefühls- und Denkweise, ~~sowie~~ einer starken Wahlverwandtschaft mit andern Worten.

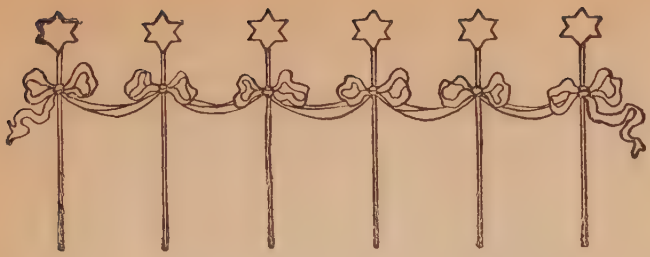
Viel Glück & allen Unternehmungen und vielerlei Freude!

Ihr

dankbarer und getreuer

Gerhart Hauptmann

Col. Grunewald
d 3 März 1899.



FOREWORD

FIVE years ago, when Gerhart Hauptmann was on a visit to this country, it was my privilege to be associated with him in the memorable production of his "Hannele." I met him for the first time at a little country inn (at Meriden, Connecticut). Instead of the aggressive, self-confident man I had fancied him, I saw a student—almost an ascetic. His boyish air and shrinking gravity were curiously at variance with the great will-power betokened by his set though tortured lips and the experience in his pale and weary eyes. He had a smooth face, a high forehead, crowned with short and careless hair, a well-shaped, sensitive nose. If I had passed him in the street I might have set him down as a perfervid young curate, or a seminarist. A painful, introspective, haunted earnestness was stamped upon his face—the face of a thinker, a dreamer, a genius.

Although Hauptmann was then hardly known to most of us, the announcement that "Hannele" was to be performed at the Fifth Avenue Theatre stirred up a storm. Frank bigots, sham philanthropists, hack writers, and political quacks, all of a sudden became filled with pious fears as to the supposed tendencies and teachings of this "Hannele." In the name of religion, they

banded themselves into a League of Ignorance, to prevent, by open action and by secret tricks, the production of what they stupidly and ignorantly proclaimed a blasphemous play. Hauptmann, who had neither invited nor desired the performance of his "dream poem," was dragged into the controversy. The newspapers took sides. At the solicitation of Commodore Elbridge T. Gerry, a Tammany Mayor forbade the appearance of the young actress who had been engaged to impersonate Hannele; while the author, the lessees of the Fifth Avenue Theatre, and the writer of these lines, who had put the drama into English, were threatened with imprisonment. The warfare waged so bitterly against the Théâtre-Libre in France and the Freie-Bühne in Germany had, by some miracle, spread to America. And the attack on the free stage was met here as it had been met abroad. Some hundreds of literary and critical people were bidden to a private representation of the much talked-of play. Next morning the papers, with a few impenitent exceptions, published eulogies of "Hannele." No one was arrested. And the public performance took place.

But the community was not yet ripe for works so strange, and deep, and true, as Hauptmann's dream-poem. "Hannele" failed. Something, however, had been accomplished. A stone had been cast into the theatrical pond, and interest in the new movement which was informing an old art with truth and life had been violently, perhaps too violently, quickened. The production of "Die Weber" ("The Weavers"), at the Irving Place Theatre, soon after renewed and strengthened the impression made by "Hannele." An earlier play, "Vor Sonnenaufgang" ("Before Sunrise"), which had established Hauptmann's reputation in Germany, had already been seen here, at the Thalia Theatre, but had passed almost unnoticed. Ere long, another work by the young master will be presented on the American boards, in English.

That work is the fairy play called "Die versunkene Glocke," of which "The Sunken Bell" is a confessedly free, but, I would fain hope, not unfaithful English transcript.

"Die versunkene Glocke" is the ninth of the ten plays that Gerhart Hauptmann has thus far thought worth preserving. His latest drama, "Fuhrmann Henschel," was interpreted at the Irving Place Theatre only a few weeks ago. His earlier works (in order of succession) are "Vor Sonnenaufgang" ("Before Sunrise"), "Das Friedensfest" ("The Family Festival"), "Einsame Menschen" ("Lonely Lives"), "Die Weber" ("The Weavers"), "College Crampton" ("Our Colleague Crampton"), "Der Biberpelz" ("The Fur Coat"), "Hannele," now known as "Hannele's Himmelfahrt," ("The Assumption of Hanele"), and "Florian Geyer." All have been written, published, and performed within one decade. And each, in its own way, is notable. This, surely, is a great record for a man so young as Hauptmann. At thirty-six—he was born at Oberpfalzbrunn, in Silesia, on the fifteenth of November, 1862—he has wrought wonders.

Unlike some men who have grown famous, in his childhood the future author of "The Sunken Bell" gave little promise. A dreamer from his nursery up, he lounged through school, winning faint praise and but few laurels from his teachers, who seem to have regarded him as hopelessly lazy and by no means brilliant. His father (a substantial innkeeper) no doubt agreed with them. But Carl, young Gerhart's brother, had more faith in the strange, wayward youth who showed so little interest in his books and so much passionate fondness for nature. He saw, or he divined, more than his elders. Years later, when he received a copy of "Vor Sonnenaufgang," he knew that he had not misplaced his confidence. After reading the play, he sent Gerhart a rather remarkable message, congratulating him on having

taken "the first step towards immortality." And it is immortality—no less—that we, who admire Gerhart Hauptmann, believe reserved for him. We see, or we fancy that we see, in the young poet-dramatist, the gift of genius. We hold him to be a legitimate successor of Goethe, and we regard him as the completer of Henrik Ibsen. We hail him as akin to the grand Russian, Tolstöi. We feel that he has inherited something—nay, much—of Shakespeare. Even as those writers, he has digged into the soul of humanity. He has probed its sorrow and its joy, its good and its evil, its hope and its despair. And out of all these things he has made plays, like unto no other plays of this our day; plays that may anger or perplex and startle some, but which, once seen, will never be forgotten. His insight into the dark mysteries of the heart is deep, his sympathy with all his kind is wide, his art rings true. Yet Ibsen himself has hardly been more combated, and hated, and decried, than Gerhart Hauptmann. Some have professed to take him for an atheist. Others have called him a nihilist. But he is neither. He is only a great artist, a true poet, and—a dramatist. Long before the appearance of "Vor Sonnenaufgang" he described his aims:

> Dir nur gehorch ich, reiner Trieb der Seele!
> Des sei mein Zeuge, Geist des Ideales,
> Das keine Rücksicht eitler Art mich bindet.
> Ich kann nicht singen wie die Philomele.
> Ich bin ein Sänger jenes düstern Tales,
> Wo alles Edle beim Ergreifen schwindet.
>
> . . .
>
> Du aber, Volk der ruhelosen Bürger,
> Du armes Volk, zu dem ich selbst mich zähle,
> Das sei mir ferne, dass ich deiner fluche!
> Durch deine Reihen gehen tausend Würger,
> Und dass ich dich, ein neuer Würger, quäle,
> Verhüt es Gott, den ich noch immer suche!

At school he was not happy. Nor was it till he went to the University of Jena with his brother Carl that he found the companionship he needed for the unfolding of his genius. At Jena, to his sorrow, he became steeped in the prevalent Darwinism of his fellow students. But his

acquired materialism, which still clogs his wings, has always been at war with his intuitive idealism. We may be sure, too, that, at some period or other, he has been affected by religious emotionalism. At twenty-two he married. Before this he had wandered through Europe, with a copy of "Childe Harold" in his pocket, visiting, among other lands, Spain and Italy. In Rome he was for a time tempted to turn sculptor. Later on, he aspired to become an actor. Happily for himself and for the stage, he abandoned both plans. In 1887, after he had published two short stories, written a few poems, and forgotten his two jejune plays ("Tiberius" and "Promethidenlos"), he made the acquaintance of Bruno Wille, the socialist, and Arno Holz, author of the "Papa Hamlet" which did so much to foster the growth of stage realism in Germany. Both men unquestionably influenced him. They led him to discard, for the time being, his old favorites—Goethe, Byron and Darwin—for Tolstöi, Zola, and Ibsen. Fresh from his long talks with Holz, and while he was still filled with admiration of Tolstoi's "Dominion of Darkness," Hauptmann went into his Silesian mountains and wrote his earliest realistic play, "Vor Sonnenaufgang." It was produced, in 1889, at the Berlin Lessing Theatre, under the auspices of the Freie-Bühne.

From that hour, his vocation was clear to him. Forsaking the conventions, the falsities, and the mock romance of the accepted German stage, he became a dramatist. His characters, drawn from life and informed with the passions of real, suffering, men and women, distressed the orthodox. The simplicity and frequent crudity of his dialogue horrified many of the critics. But others, like Theodor Fontane and Otto Brahm, had more discernment. Soon Hauptmann came to be looked up to as the standard-bearer, the champion, of the "new movement." In "Lonely Lives" his art grew more delicate and more psychological. It broadened marvellously in the work which some maintain to be his masterpiece—the epic of

misery known to us as "The Weavers." This was followed by "Hannele." The appearance of each play, whether in book-form or on the boards, was the signal for fresh outbreaks of enthusiasm and virulent hostility. With the production of his historic play, "Florian Geyer," Hauptmann for the first time met disaster. "Florian Geyer" was to have formed part of a dramatic trilogy woven about the grand story of the Reformation. The poet had put his whole soul into his work, and its failure almost paralyzed his energy. But he recovered. When things looked darkest to him, and he had begun to doubt his own genius, he received news that the Grillparzer Prize had been awarded to him for his "Hannele." It was about this time he wrote "The Sunken Bell."

Hauptmann has chosen to call "The Sunken Bell" "a German fairy play." Those who so wish may take the author's description literally, and spare themselves the trouble of seeking to read into the work the deep significance that most will find in it. To the literal, a primrose but a primrose is, and the characters in "The Sunken Bell"—Heinrich, the bell-founder, who breaks his heart in the vain effort to reach the sun and to create a wondrous chime; Rautendelein, the elf, who spirits him to her wild mountain home; Magda, the deserted wife; the Vicar, the Barber, and the Schoolmaster, who go in search of the lost Master; the Nickelmann, the Wood-Sprite, Old Wittikin, and all the rest of them—will seem but figures in a lovely though mysterious legend, spun out of the German folk-lore (some acquaintance with which is indispensable to a full comprehension of even the most superficial sense of the play). To these I take the liberty of commending Grimm's "Teutonic Mythology." Hauptmann had unquestionably studied that work closely before writing "The Sunken Bell." His elves, his sprites, and his wise-woman, are not chance creations. All have their places and their meanings in the myths of Germany.

But it can hardly be doubted that there is more, yea, infinitely more, in the words, the characters, and the plot, of "The Sunken Bell" than a mere fairy tale, however beautiful. Each eye will see in them what it is capable of seeing. Each mind will read into them the meaning that best fits its own experience. Some may interpret the symbolism of the play from an æsthetic standpoint. Some may enrich it with a world-wide sense—moral, or religious, or social, or all three. The drama has, aptly enough, been likened to a symphony. Who would dare say that he has fathomed the whole meaning of the grand "Choral?" Or even of less certain master-works ?

Look at the story of "The Sunken Bell" with the eye of an artist, and you may take it as a parable showing the eternal effort of all artists (typified in Heinrich) to attain their æsthetic ideals. View the play from the standpoint of the reformer, and you may interpret it as the tale of the dreamer who, hampered by inevitable conditions, strives to remodel human society. For my own part I incline to regard Heinrich, the bell-founder, as a symbol of Humanity struggling painfully towards the realization of its dream of the ideal truth and joy and light and justice. Rautendelein in this reading stands for Nature, or, rather, for the freedom and sincerity of Nature, missing a re-union with which Humanity can never hope to reach the supreme truth and the supreme bliss of which the Sun is the emblem. In Magda, the poor, faithful, patient wife, whose dead hand, in the tragical fourth act, tolls the bell that arouses Heinrich from his dream, we have a symbol of the domestic loves, the earthly ties, from which no man, however noble and far-reaching be his aims, can be released. Old Wittikin embodies the eternal, passionless, philosophy of Life. The Vicar, the Barber, and the Schoolmaster stand for the conventions—the half-dead, half-living, creeds, theories, and superstitions of society, which stand in the way of the idealist. Heinrich makes the

attempt to break with them. Filled with despair at the failure of his old ideals (symbolized in the lost bell), and enlightened by communion with Rautendelein, he turns his back on all the shams, and alas, on some of the realities, which bind him to the earth. The kiss of the fair elf who heals him when he lies upon his sick-bed broadens his vision, steels his hand, puts youth into his soul. Only by a mystical union with the Nature which society, as it is now constituted, has disowned, can he "work wonders with the power on high" and fashion the grand peal of bells which is to ring out a new, glad, and merciful, Gospel through the world.

And Heinrich's Gospel would weld the forgotten truths of a pure, primitive Christianity with the sweet teachings of a serene Paganism. But it is not proclaimed. For, to perfect his mighty task, Heinrich must have faith in his own purpose. He must be more than man: more even than Over-man. He must be god-like. Although Rautendelein may name him Balder, god of the Spring and joy of life, he is no god, but only a poor searcher after light. Doubt and materialism, symbolized in the Nickelmann, and earthly lusts, embodied in the Wood-Sprite, disturb him on the threshold of his triumph. His old ideals may be sunk in the dark mountain mere; but they are not quite dead. And when the bell, "the long-lost, buried, bell" peals out; when the visions of his poor lads appear to him; he has not strength, he has not the incredible and superhuman steadfastness, to withstand their appeal. He spurns "the very pinion of his soul," Rautendelein, and leaves his heights. "What's past is past—what's done is done for aye!" His early ideals have perished. He has rejected his new light. So, when Old Wittikin—wise-woman, but not witch—comes with the cup of death, he drinks it thankfully. And, as he dies to earth, Rautendelein returns to him for a brief moment, bringing comfort. "Heinrich! The sun is coming!" His eyes are filled with mystic radiance. His ears are charmed with the

sweet music of the sun-bells—his sun-bells—that were to have rung joy throughout the world.

Some may see pessimism in this ending of the tragedy—others, optimism. The creator of "The Sunken Bell" leaves us to draw our own inferences.

CHARLES HENRY MELTZER.

New York, June, 1899.

"Open the windows—Light and God stream in."

Characters

Heinrich, *a bell-founder*
Magda, *his wife*
Two Children, *boys*, aged 5 and 9
The Vicar
The Schoolmaster
The Barber
Old Wittikin
Rautendelein, *an elfin creature*
The Nickelmann, *an elemental spirit*
The Wood-sprite
Four Elves
Trolds and Dwarfs
Villagers

¶The scenes are laid in the mountains and in a village below.

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THE SUNKEN BELL.

HEINRICH:—How beautiful it seems! the rustling boughs
Have such a strange, full sound.....

No. 7. ACT I.

Andantino.

pp

Armonioso.
2 Ped.

mf *p* *mf*

crescendo. poco a poco.

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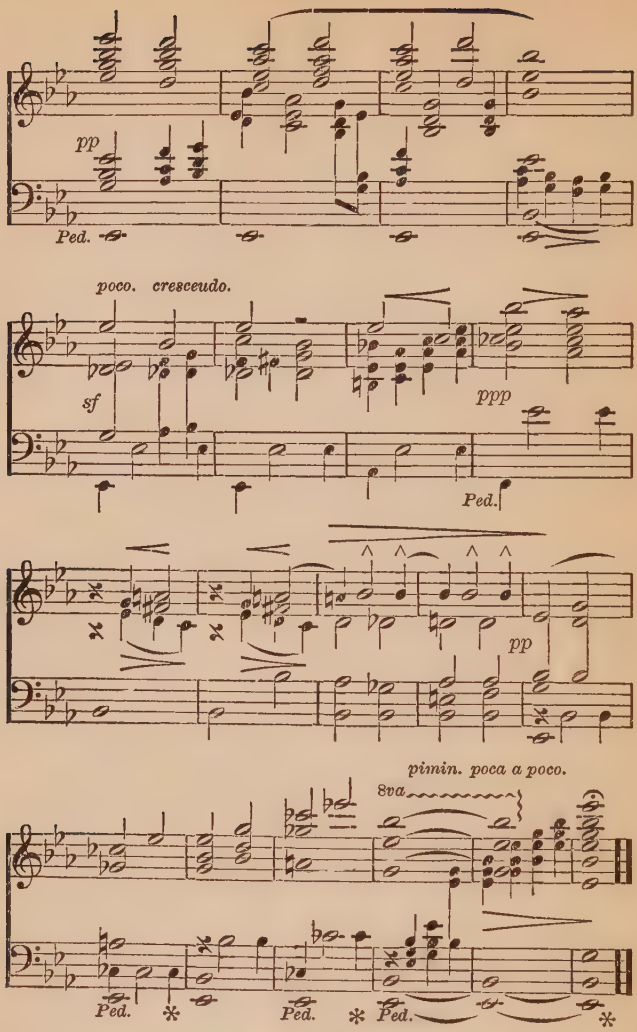

pp
Ped.
poco. cresceudo.
sf
ppp
Ped.
pp
pimin. poca a poco.
8va
Ped.
Ped.
Ped.

ELVES.—*"First, second and third Elves steal out of the woods one after the other, and join hands in a dance."*

No. 9. ACT I.

Allegretto.

ppp

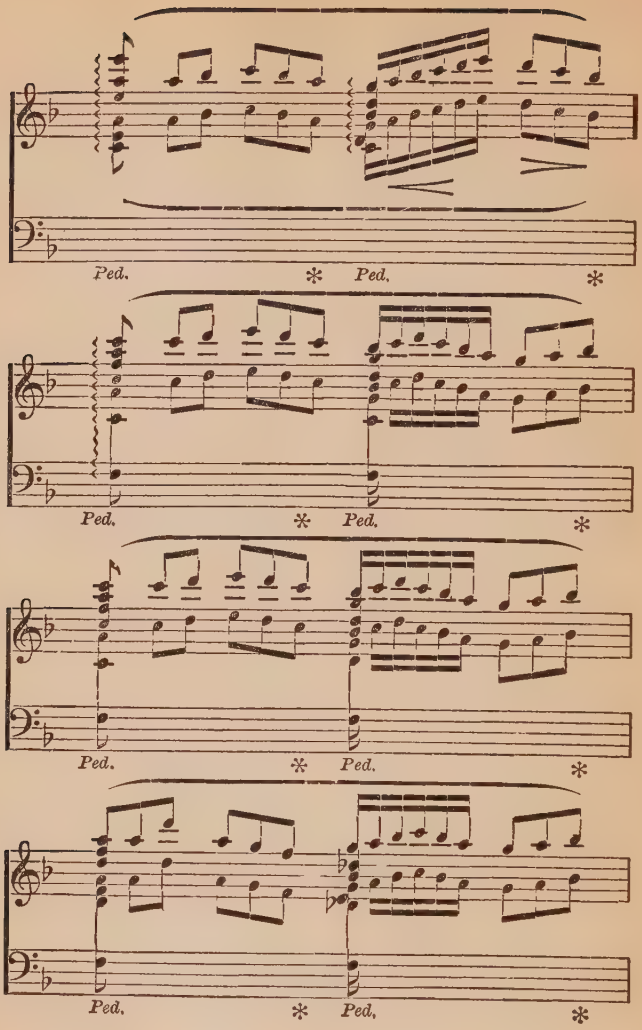
Molto legato.

2 Ped. ✻ *Ped.* ✻

ppp

Ped. ✻ *Ped.* ✻

Ped. ✻ *Ped.* ✻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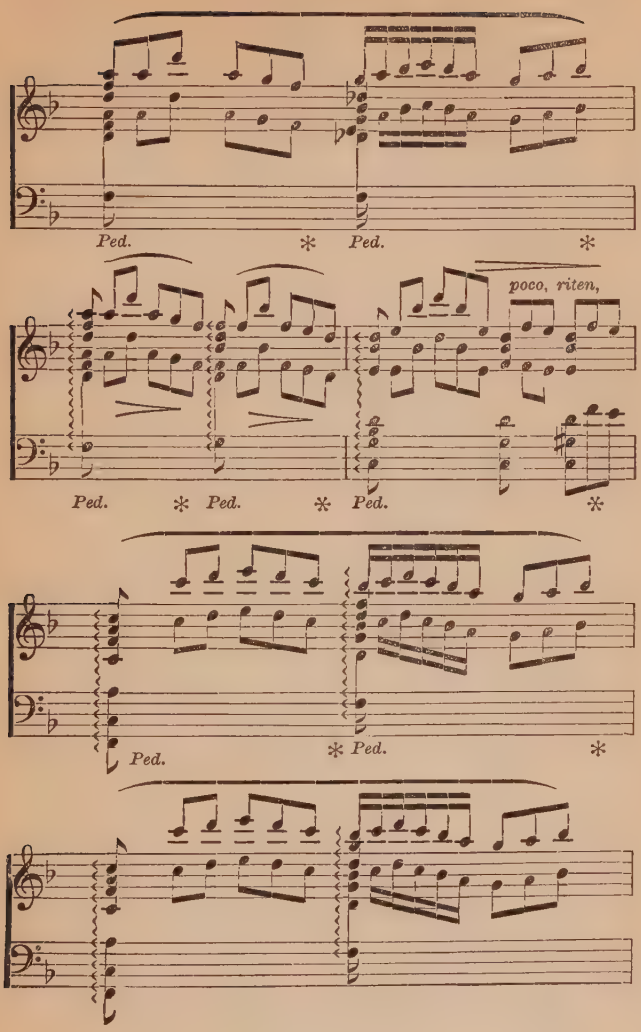
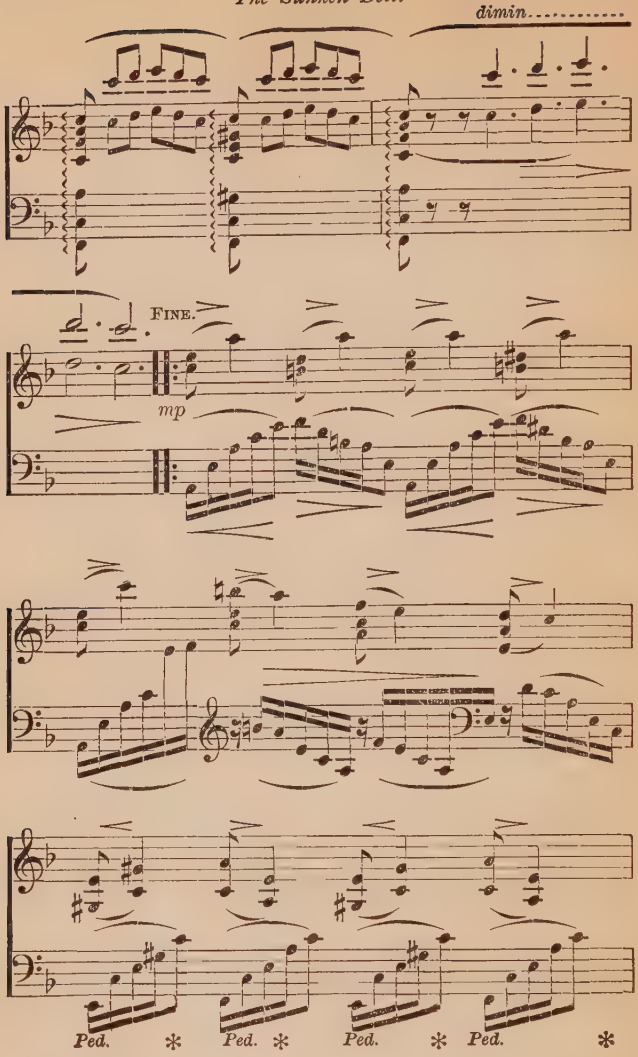

Ped. * Ped. *
poco, riten,
Ped. * Ped. * Ped. *
Ped. * Ped. *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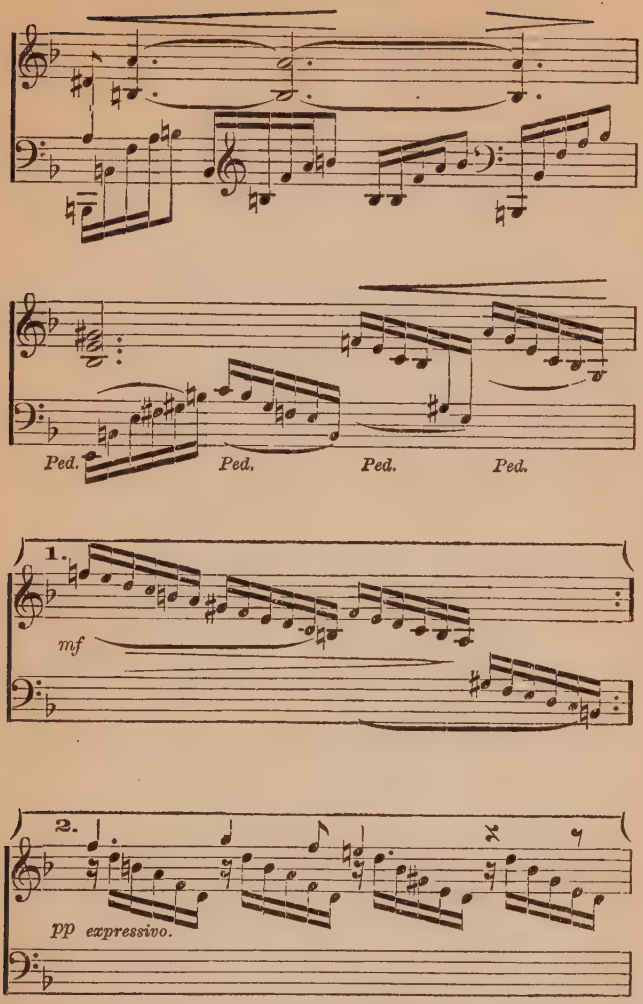
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1.
mf
2.
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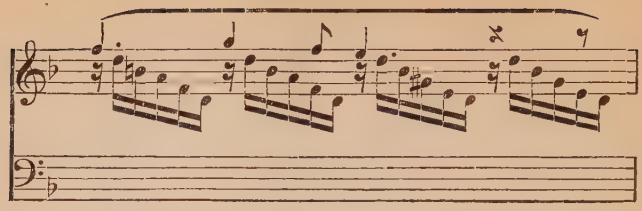

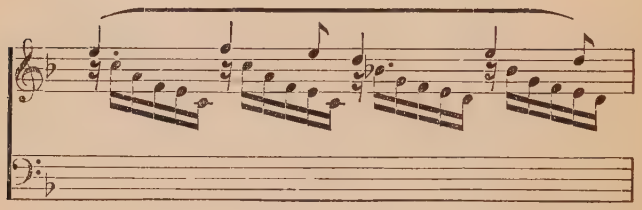

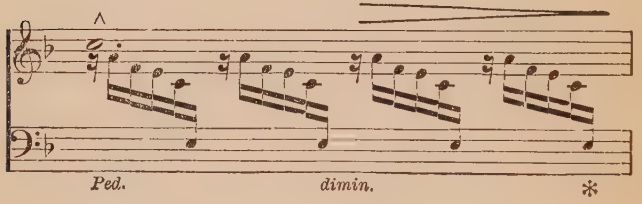
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dimin.
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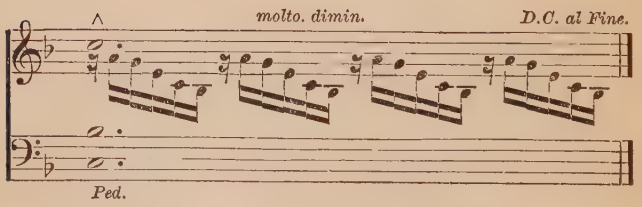
molto. dimin.
D.C. al Fine.
Ped.

THE SUNKEN BELL.

Act One.

Scene: *A fir-clad glade in the mountains. R. up stage, beneath an overhanging rock, a hut, with practicable door and windows. L. C. an old well.*

Rautendelein *is seated on the edge of the well, combing her thick golden locks and addressing a bee which she is trying to drive away. In one hand she has a mirror.*

Rautendelein.

Thou buzzing, golden, wight—whence com'st thou here?
Thou sipper of sweets, thou little wax-maker!
Nay! Tease me not, thou sun-born good-for-naught!
Dost hear? . . . Begone! . . . 'Tis time I combed my hair
With Granny's golden comb. Should I delay,
She'll scold me when she comes. Begone, I say!
What? . . . Loit'ring still? . . . Away—away with thee!
Am I a rose bush? . . . Are my lips a rose?
Off to the wood with thee, beyond the brook!
There, there, my pretty bee, bloom cowslips fair,
And crocuses, and violets—thou canst suck
Thy fill of them. Dost think I jest? No. No.
Quick! Get thee home. Thou'rt not in favor here.
Thou knowest, Granny owes thee many a grudge
For furnishing the Church with altar-lights.
Come! Must I speak again? Go not too far!
Hey! . . . Chimney! Puff some smoke across the glade,
To drive away this naughty, wilful, bee.

Ho! Gander! Hither! Hither! . . . Hurry! Hurry!
Away! Away! [*Bee flies off.*] . . . At last! . . .

[RAUTENDELEIN *combs her hair quietly for a moment or two. Then, leaning over the well, she calls down.*]

Hey! Nickelmann!

[*Pause.*]

He does not hear me. Well—I'll sing to myself.

Where do I come from? . . . Whither go?
Tell me—I long to know!
Did I grow as the birds of the woodland gay?
Am I a fay?
Who asks the sweet flower
That blooms in the dell,
And brightens the bower,
Its tale to tell?
Yet, oft, as I sit by my well, alone,
I sigh for the mother I ne'er have known.
But my weird I must dree—
And I'm fair to see—
A golden-haired maid of the forest free!

[*Pause. She calls.*]

Hey! Nickelmann! Come up! 'Tis lonely here.
Granny's gone gathering fir-apples. I'm dull—
So dull. . . Wilt keep me company and tell
Me tales? Why then, to-night, perhaps, as a reward . . .
I'll creep into some farmer's yard and steal
A big, black, cock for thee! . . . Ah, here he comes!
The silver bubbles to the surface mount!
If he should bob up now, the glass he'd break,
That such bright answer to my nod doth make.

[*Admiring her reflection in the well.*]

Godden' to thee, my sweet maid o' the well!
Thy name? . . . Rautendelein? . . . Indeed! I see—
Thou'rt jealous of my beauty. Look at me.
For I, not thou, Rautendelein should be.
What didst thou answer? Didst thou dare to point
Thy finger at thy soft twin-breasts? . . . Nay, nay—

I'm fairer; fair as Freya. Not for naught
My hair was spun out of the sunbeams red,
To shine, in golden glory, even as the sun
Shines up at us, at noon, from out a lake.
Aha! Thou spread'st thy tresses, like a net,
All fiery-scarlet, set to catch the fishes!
Thou poor, vain, foolish, trull . . . There! Catch this stone.

[*Throwing pebble down the well and disturbing the reflection.*]

Thy hour is ended. Now—I'm fair alone!

[*Calling.*]

Ho! Nickelmann! Come—help me pass the time!

[*The* NICKELMANN, *a water-spirit, half emerges from the well, and flops over the edge. He is streaming with water. Weeds cling to his head. He snorts like a seal, and his eyes blink as if the daylight hurt them.*]

He's here! . . . Ha! Ha! Ha! Ha! How dreadfully plain
He is! . . . Didst thou not hear me call! Dear, dear--
It makes one's flesh creep but to know him near!

THE NICKELMANN [*croaking*].

Brekekekex!

RAUTENDELEIN [*mocking*].

Brekekekex! Ay, ay--
It smells of springtide. Well, is that so strange?
Why--every lizard, mole, and worm, and mouse—
The veriest water-rat—had scented that.
The quail, the hare, the trout, the fly, the weeds,
Had told thee Spring was here.

THE NICKELMANN [*touchily*].

Brekekekex!
Be not too nosey-wise. Dost understand?
Thou ape, thou midge, thou tomtit, irk me not!
I say, beware! . . . So, Quorax! Quack! Quack! Quack!

RAUTENDELEIN.

If Master Uncle's cross to-day,
I'll leave him all alone to play.
And I'll go dance a ring-a-round.
Partners a-plenty, I'll be bound,
For pretty maidens may be found.

[*Calling.*]

Heigh-y-aye!

Voice of WOOD-SPRITE [*heard without*].

Heigh-y-o!

RAUTENDELEIN.

My merry faun, come—dance with me, I pray!
[*Enter the* WOOD-SPRITE, *skipping comically across the glade.*]

THE WOOD-SPRITE.

Nay, I'm no dancer; but I know a leap
Would make the mountain-goat with envy weep.
If that won't do for thee, I know a game
Will please thee more, my nixey. Fly with me;
I'll show thee in the woods a willow tree
All hollowed out with age, where never came
The sound of babbling brook, nor crow of cock.
There, in the shadow of some friendly rock,
I'll cut for thee, my own, the wond'rous pipe
All maids must dance to.

RAUTENDELEIN [*eluding him*].

Thanks, I'm not yet ripe
For such as thou! An thou must play thy pranks,
Go—woo thy wood-wench. She may like thy shanks!
Or—go to thy dear partner, who—they say—
Another baby bears thee every day;
Except on Sundays, when, at early morn,
Three dirty little brats to thee are born!
Ha! Ha! Ha!

[*She runs off into the hut, laughing. The* WOOD-SPRITE *vainly pursues her and returns disconsolate.*]

THE NICKELMANN.

Brekekekex! How mad the baggage seems!
The lightning blast thee!

THE WOOD-SPRITE [*sitting*].

Ay! . . . I'd love to tame her.

[*He produces a short pipe and lights it by striking a match on his hoof.*]

THE NICKELMANN.

And how go things at home?

THE WOOD-SPRITE.

So so. So so.
It's warmer here than on the hills. You're snug.
Up yonder the wind shrieks and howls all day;
The swollen clouds drift damp about the peaks,
And burst at last, like sponges, when they're squeezed.
A foul time we have of it!

THE NICKELMANN.

And is that all?

THE WOOD-SPRITE.

No . . . Yesterday I cut
My first spring salad. It grew near my hut.
This morning, early, I went out,
And, roaming carelessly about,
Through brush and brier,
Then climbing higher,
At last I reached the topmost wood.
There I espied a hateful brood
Of mortals, who did sweat and stew,
And dig the earth, and marble hew.
A curse upon their church and creed—
Their chapels, and their clanging bells *—

* The sprites and dwarfs hated bells, especially church bells, as disturbers of their ancient privacy.

THE NICKELMANN.

Their bread they mix with cummin-seed!*

THE WOOD-SPRITE.

They plague us in our woods and wells.
But vain is all our wrath and woe.
Beside the deep abyss 'twill grow
With tower and spire, and, overhead,
The cross that you and I do dread.
Ay! . . . The noisy monster was all but hung
In the lofty steeple, and soon had rung.
But I was alert! We shall never hear
That bell! It is drowned in the mere!

[*Changing tone.*]

By cock and pie!
A devil of a joke! . . . I stood on the brink
Of the cliff, chewing sorrel, to help me think,
As I rested against a stump of birch,
'Mid the mountain grasses, I watched the church.
When, all of a sudden, I saw the wing
Of a blood-red butterfly, trying to cling
To a stone. And I marked how it dipped, and tipped,
As if from a blossom the sweet it sipped.
I called. It fluttered, to left and to right,
Until on my hand I felt it light.
I knew the elf. It was faint with fright.
We babbled o' this,
And we babbled o' that,
Of the frogs that had spawned
Ere the day had dawned,—
We babbled and gabbled, a-much, I wis:
Then it broke
Into tears! . . .
I calmed its fears.
And again it spoke.

* Cummin-seed was obnoxious to the sprites.

"O, they're cracking their whips,
"And they gee! and they whoa!
"As they drag it aloft
"From the dale below.
"'Tis some terrible tub, that has lost its lid,
"All of iron! Will nobody rid
"Our woods of the horrible thing? 'Twould make
"The bravest moss-mannikin shudder and quake.
"They swear they will hang it, these foolish people,
"High up in the heart of the new church steeple,
"And they'll hammer, and bang, at its sides all day
"To frighten good spirits of earth away!"

I hummed, and I hawed, and I said, ho ho!
As the butterfly fell to the earth: while I
Stole off in pursuit of a herd near by.
I guzzled my fill of good milk, I trow!
Three udders ran dry. They will seek in vain
So much as a drop of it more to drain.
Then, making my way to a swirling stream,
I hid in the brush, as a sturdy team
Came snorting, and panting, along the road—
Eight nags, tugging hard at their heavy load.
We will bide our time, quoth I—and lay
Quite still in the grass, till the mighty dray
Rumbled by:—when, stealing from hedge to hedge,
And hopping and skipping from rock to rock,
I followed the fools. They had reached the edge
Of the cliff when there came—a block!
With flanks all a-quiver, and hocks a-thrill,
They hauled and they lugged at the dray until,
Worn out by the struggle to move the bell,
They had to lie down for a moment. Well—
Quoth I to myself, the Faun will play
Them a trick that will spare them more work to-day,
One clutch at the wheel—I had loosened a spoke—
A wrench, and a blow, and the wood-work broke.
A wobble, a crack, and the hateful bell

Rolled over—and into the gulf it fell!
And oh, how it sounded,
And clanged, as it bounded,
From crag to crag, on its downward way:
Till at last in the welcoming splash and the spray
Of the lake it was lost—for aye!

[*During the* WOOD-SPRITE'S *speech night has drawn near. It is now dusk. Several times, towards the end of the narrative, faint cries for help have been heard, coming from the wood. Enter from back,* HEINRICH. *As he approaches the hut, the* WOOD-SPRITE *vanishes in the wood and the* NICKELMANN *disappears in the well.* HEINRICH *is about* 30 *years of age. His face is pale and careworn.*]

HEINRICH.

Good people—open! Quick! I've lost my way!
Help! Help! I've fallen! . . . I am weak . . . I faint!
Will no one answer? . . . Help! Kind people! Help!

[*He sinks on the ground, unconscious, near the hut. The sun has set—dark purple clouds hang over the hills. The wind rises. Enter from the wood, carrying a basket on her back,* OLD WITTIKIN.]

WITTIKIN.

Rautendel'! Come and help me with my load!
I've too much on my shoulders. Come, I say!
I'm scant o' breath! . . . Where can the girl be dawdling?

[*A bat flies across the glade.*]

Ho! Stop thy gadding, flitter-mouse, and list!
Thou'lt fill thy greedy craw quite soon enough.
Come hither. Fly through yonder hole and see
If she's within. Then send her quick to me!

[*Faint lightning.* WITTIKIN *shakes her fist at the sky.*]

Ay, ay, I see thee, Father Thor! . . . 'Twill storm!
But give thy noisy goats not too much rope,
And see thy great red beard gleams not too bright.
Rautendel'! Hey! Rautendel' . . . Dost not hear?

[*A squirrel skips across the path.*]

Mr. Sothern as Heinrich

"Good people—open! Quick! I've lost my way!"—Act I.

Hey! Squirrel! Thou hast fleet and nimble feet.
Hop thou into the hut, and, shouldst thou meet
Rautendel', send her hither. As a treat,
I'll give thee, for thy pains, a nut to eat!

[WITTIKIN *sees* HEINRICH *and touches him contemptuously with her foot.*]

What's this? A stranger? Well, well, I declare!
And pray, what brings you here, my man, so late?
Rautendel'!... Hey! Rautendel'! [*To* HEINRICH]. Are you dead?
Plague take you! As if I'd not more'n enough
To worry me—what wi' the Bailiff and the Priest
Hunting me down like a mad dog. And now
I find a dead man at my door—Rautendel'!
A rare time I'd have of it, I'll be bound,
If they should find this fellow lying here.
They'd burn my house about my ears. [*To* HEINRICH.] Art dumb?
Ay. Ay.

[RAUTENDELEIN *enters from hut, and looks out inquiringly.*]

Oho! Thou'rt come at last. Look there!
We have a visitor. And what a one!
He's still enough. Go! Fetch a truss of hay,
And make a litter.

RAUTENDELEIN.

In the hut?

WITTIKIN [*grumbling*].

What next?
Nay, nay. We've no room in the hut for him.

[*Exit into hut.* RAUTENDELEIN *follows her. She reappears a moment later, with an armful of hay, and is about to kneel beside* HEINRICH, *when he recovers consciousness.*]

HEINRICH.

Where am I? Maiden—wilt thou answer me?

RAUTENDELEIN.

Why, in the mountains.

HEINRICH.

In the mountains? Ay—
But how . . . and why? What brought me here to-night?

RAUTENDELEIN.

Nay, gentle stranger, naught know I of that.
Why fret thyself about such trifles? See—
Here I have brought thee hay. So lay thy head
Down and take all the rest thou need'st.

HEINRICH.

Yes! Yes!
'Tis rest I need. Indeed—indeed—thou'rt right.
But rest will come to me no more, my child!

[*Uneasily.*]

Now . . . tell me . . . what has happened?

RAUTENDELEIN.

Nay, if I knew . . .

HEINRICH.

Meseems . . . methinks . . . and . . . then . . . all ends in dreams.
Ay, surely, I am dreaming.

RAUTENDELEIN.

Here is milk.
Thou must drink some of it, for thou art weak.

HEINRICH [*eagerly*].

Thanks, maiden. I will drink. Give me the milk.

[*He drinks from a bowl which she offers him.*]

RAUTENDELEIN.

[*While he drinks.*]

Thou art not used to mountain ways. Thy home
Lies in the vale below, where mortals dwell.
And, like a hunter who once fell from the cliff

While giving chase to some wild mountain fowl,
Thou hast climbed far too high. And yet . . . that man
Was not quite fashioned as the man thou art.

HEINRICH.

[*After drinking and looking ecstatically and fixedly at* RAUTENDELEIN.]

Speak on! Speak on! Thy drink was very sweet.
But sweeter yet thy voice . . .

[*Again becoming anxious.*]

She said—a man
Not fashioned like myself. A better man—
And yet he fell! . . . Speak on, my child.

RAUTENDELEIN.

Why speak?
What can my words avail? I'll rather go
And fetch thee water from the brook, to wash
The blood and dust from off thy brow . . .

HEINRICH.

[*Pleading and grasping her by the wrist.* RAUTENDELEIN *stands undecided.*]

Ah, stay!
And look into mine eyes with thy strange eyes.
For lo, the world, within thine eyes renewed,
So sweetly bedded, draws me back to life!
Stay, child. O stay!

RAUTENDELEIN [*uneasy*].

Then . . . as thou wilt. And yet . . .

HEINRICH [*fevered and imploring*].

Ah, stay with me! Thou wilt not leave me so?
Thou dost not dream how dear to me thou art.
O, wake me not, my child. I'll tell thee all.
I fell . . . Yet—no. Speak thou; for thy dear voice

Has Heaven's own music. God did give it thee.
And I will listen. Speak! . . . Wilt thou not speak?
Wilt thou not sing to me? Why then . . . I must . . .
I fell. I know not how—I've told thee that—
Whether the path gave way beneath my feet;
Whether 'twas willingly I fell, or no—
God wot. Enough. I fell into the gulf.

[*More fevered.*]

And then I clutched at a wild cherry tree
That grew between the rocks. It broke—and I,
Still clasping a bough tightly, felt a shower
Of pale pink blossoms riot round my head;
Then swift was hurled to the abyss—and died!
And even now I'm dead. It must be so.
Let no one wake me!

RAUTENDELEIN [*uncertainly*].

Yet thou seem'st alive!

HEINRICH.

I know—I know—what once I did not know:
That Life is Death, and only Death is Life.

[*Collapsing again.*]

I fell. I lived—and fell. The bell fell, too!
We two—the bell and I. Was I the first—
To slip, and next—the bell? Or—the reverse?
Who seeks to know? And who could prove the truth?
And even were it proven, what care I?
Then I was living. Now—ah, now . . . I'm dead.

[*Tenderly.*]

Ah, go not yet!

[*Looks at his hand.*]

My hand! . . . 'Tis white as milk!
My hand! . . . It hangs so heavy! . . . It seems dead.
I cannot lift it! . . . Yet—
The mere touch of thy soft hair doth bring relief,
As water of Bethesda! . . . Sweet—how sweet
Thou art! . . . Nay. Do not fear my hand. Thou'rt sacred!
Where have we met? . . . I surely know thy face.

Somewhere, but where, or when, I cannot tell,
I wrought for thee, and strove—in one grand Bell,
To wed the silver music of thy voice
With the warm gold of a Sun-holiday.
It should have been a master-work! . . . I failed.
Then wept I tears of blood.

RAUTENDELEIN.

Wept tears of blood?
I cannot follow thee. What be these tears?

HEINRICH [*trying to raise his head*].

Thou lovely picture! . . . Help me to sit up.

[RAUTENDELEIN *stoops and supports his head.*]

Dost thou bend down to me? Then, with love's arms,
Do thou release me from this cruel Earth,
Whereunto the hour nails me, as to a cross.
Release me! For thou canst. I know thou canst!
And, with thy tender hands, pluck off the thorns
That crown my head. No crown! Love—only Love!

[*His head is slightly raised. He seems exhausted.*]

Thanks! Thanks!

[*Gently and in a lost kind of way as he looks at the landscape.*]

How beautiful it seems! The rustling boughs
Have such a strange, full, sound. The darkling arms
Of the great firs move so mysteriously.
How solemnly their heads sway to and fro!
The very soul of fairy fantasy
Sighs through the wood. It murmurs low, and then,
Still gently whisp'ring, stirs the tiny leaves.
Now it goes singing through the green wood-grass.
And now, veiled all in misty white, behold,
It nears—it stretches out its long white hand
And points at me! . . . Come closer! Touch my ear . . .
My tongue . . . my eyes! . . . 'Tis gone! Yet thou art here!
Thou art my fantasy! . . Kiss me, sweet fantasy!

[*He faints.*]

RAUTENDELEIN [*half to herself*].

Thy speech is strange. I know not what to make of 't.
[*She suddenly resolves to go.*]
Lie thou, and sleep.

HEINRICH [*dreaming*].

Kiss me, sweet fantasy!

[RAUTENDELEIN *stops, and gazes at* HEINRICH. *The darkness deepens.* RAUTENDELEIN *suddenly grows frightened and calls.*]

RAUTENDELEIN.

O grandmother!

WITTIKIN [*from within the hut*].

Well, girl?

RAUTENDELEIN.

Come here! Come here!

WITTIKIN [*as above*].

Nay, come thou here, and help me make the fire!

RAUTENDELEIN.

O Granny!

WITTIKIN.

Hark'ee, wench. Dost hear me? Come.
'Tis time we fed the goat. And then to milk it!

RAUTENDELEIN.

Grandmother! Help him! Help him! He is dying!
[*Enter from hut,* WITTIKIN. *She stands on the threshold, holding a milk pail in her left hand, and calls to her cat.*]

WITTIKIN.

Here! Puss, Puss, Puss!
[*She looks carelessly at* HEINRICH.]

He hasn't budged, I see.
Well—mortals all must die. No help for it.
What matter? Let him be. He's better so.
Come—pussy! pussy! . . . Here is milk for thee—
Why, where is pussy?

[*Calling.*]

Hurry, hurry, wood-folk, when I call!
Here, I've milk a-plenty for ye all!
Hurry, hurry, hurry, trold and sprite!

[*Enter ten droll little* TROLDS, *male and female. They bustle about the milk pail.*]

Here is bread—for every one a bite!
Here's enough to drink, and here's to eat:
Food that dukes and earls 'ud count a treat.

[*To one of the* TROLDS.]

Thou, go!
Thou art full, I trow.

[*To the other* TROLDS.]

For thee a sop—
And for thee a drop—
Now enough ye've guzzled,
And off ye hop!

[*They riot and shout.*]

I'll have ye muzzled,
Unless ye stop!
Nay, this won't do—
Ye riotous crew!
Enough for to-day!
Away! Away!

[*The* TROLDS *vanish into the wood. Moonlight. The* WOOD-SPRITE *appears, seated on the rocks beyond the hut. Putting his horny hands to his mouth, he imitates the echo of a cry for help.*]

THE WOOD-SPRITE.

Help! Help!

WITTIKIN.

Why, what's amiss?

DISTANT VOICES [*from the wood*].

Heinrich! Heinrich!

THE WOOD-SPRITE [*as above*].

Help! Help!

WITTIKIN [*threateningly to the* WOOD-SPRITE].

Fool, thy knavish antics cease!
Leave our mountain-folk in peace!
Ay, ay. It pleases thee to vent thy spite
On the poor glass-workers! . . . Thou lov'st to bite
Stray dogs—to lead lost travelers into fogs,
And see them floundering in the moorland bogs.

THE WOOD-SPRITE.

Granny, never heed my jests.
Soon thou shalt have noble guests!
Who rides on the goose's down?
The barber, light as lather.
Who rides on the goose's crown?
The parson, reverend father—
The teacher, with his cue—
Three screech-owls—all for you!

THE VOICES [*nearer*].

Heinrich!

THE WOOD-SPRITE [*as before*].

Help!

WITTIKIN.

Now may the lightning strike thee!
Wouldst hang a schoolmaster about my neck,
And eke a parson?
[*Shaking her fist at the* WOOD-SPRITE.]
Thou shalt smart for this.
I'll send thee swarming gnats, and stinging flies,
To plague thee till thou shalt be so distraught
Thou'lt long to hide thyself.

THE WOOD-SPRITE [*with malignant glee*].

They're coming, Granny!
[*He disappears.*]

WITTIKIN.

Well, what o' that? They're no concern o' mine.
[*To* RAUTENDELEIN, *who is gazing fixedly at* HEINRICH.]
Into the hut! Blow out the light! To bed!
Quick, wench!

RAUTENDELEIN [*sullen and defiant*].

I won't!

WITTIKIN.

What? Disobey me?

RAUTENDELEIN.

Yes!

WITTIKIN.

And why?

RAUTENDELEIN.

They'll take him from me.

WITTIKIN.

Well? What of 't?

RAUTENDELEIN.

They must not take him, Granny!

WITTIKIN.

Girl, ha' done!
And let them deal wi' him as they may list.
Dust will to dust, and some day he must die.
So let him die. He'll be the better for 't.
See how life irks him, how it rends his heart,
Wi' pain and agony.

HEINRICH [*Dreaming*].

The Sun sets fast!

WITTIKIN.

He never saw the Sun, girl! Let him be.
Come. Follow me. Be warned, or thou wilt rue!

[*Exit into hut. Cries of "Heinrich! Heinrich!"* RAUTENDELEIN *listens for a moment. Then she suddenly breaks a flowery twig from a bough, and draws a circle with it round* HEINRICH *as she speaks the following lines.*]

RAUTENDELEIN.

With the first fresh buds of Spring,
Lo, I draw the magic ring!
Safe from every harm and ill,
Thus thou art. It is my will!
Thou art thine, and thine, and mine;
None may cross the mystic line!
Be thou youth, or man, or maid,
Here thou surely must be stayed!

[*She hides behind the trees in shadow.*]

[*Enter one after the other, from the wood, the* VICAR, *the* BARBER, *and the* SCHOOLMASTER.]

THE VICAR.

I see a light.

THE SCHOOLMASTER.

And I!

THE VICAR.

Where are we now?

THE BARBER.

God only knows. Again I hear that cry
Of "Help! Help! Help!"

THE VICAR.

It is the Master's voice!

THE SCHOOLMASTER.

I heard no cry.

THE BARBER.

It came from yonder height.

THE SCHOOLMASTER.

If one fell up to Heaven, that might be,
But, as a general rule, one tumbles—down:
From cliff to vale, and not from vale to cliff.
The Master lies—I'd stake my soul upon 't—
Full fifty fathoms deeper: not up here.

THE BARBER.

Ods bodikins! Did you not hear him then?
If that was not the voice of Master Heinrich,
May I be set to shave old Rübezahl!
As I'm a living barber, I will swear
I heard a cry.

THE SCHOOLMASTER.

Where from?

THE VICAR.

What place is this?
Ere we continue, tell me that, my friends.
My face is bleeding; I can hardly drag
One foot after another. How they do ache!
I'll go no further.

A VOICE.

Help!

THE VICAR.

Again that voice!

THE BARBER.

And this time it was close to where we stand!

THE VICAR [*sitting wearily*].

I'm racked with pain. Indeed, my worthy friends,
I can no more. So leave me, in God's name.
In truth, though you should beat me black and blue,
You could not make me budge another step.
I am worn out. Alack, that this glad day
Should end so sadly! Who had ever thought
Such things could happen! And the mighty bell –
The noblest of the Master's master-works——!
Thy ways, O Lord, indeed pass finding out
And are most wonderful!

THE BARBER.

Ay, Father, ay.
And do you wish to know what place this be?
Well, I will tell you. If you'll be advised,
You'll get from hence—and that without delay.
'Twere better far we spent the livelong night
Bare-backed, and in a hornet's nest, than here.
For, by the Lord, we're on the Silver Hill!
Within a hundred steps should stand the house
Of that accursèd witch. So—let's away!

THE VICAR.

I cannot budge.

THE SCHOOLMASTER.

Nay, come, I pray you, come.
Worse things than witches are encountered here.
If they were all, I should not turn a hair.
Ah, there's no wilder spot for leagues around—
A paradise of smugglers, thieves, and rogues—
A trysting-place for cut-throat murderers—
So infamous that Peter,—he who longed
To know what fear and trembling meant—might learn
Both easily—if he but came this way.

THE BARBER.

Yes. One and one make two—we all know that.
But that is not the only thing worth knowing.
I hope, my master, you may never learn
What witchcraft means! . . The hellish sluts who lurk,
Like toads in a hole, hatching their evil plots,
May send you illnesses, and plague your ox,
Make blood flow from the udders of your cows
Instead of milk, and rot your sheep with worms—
Or curse your children with unwholesome wens,
And horrible ulcers. All this they can do.

THE SCHOOLMASTER.

You're wandering, Sirs. The night has turned your heads.
While you go babbling here of witches' games,
Your ears grow dull. Heard you not moans? By Heaven!
I see the very man we seek!

THE VICAR.

See whom?

THE SCHOOLMASTER.

Why, Master Heinrich.

THE BARBER.

O, he's lost his wits!

THE VICAR.

'Twas witchcraft.

THE SCHOOLMASTER.

Nay, then two and two's not four,
But five. And that's impossible. Prate not
Of witches. For, as I do hope for Heaven,
There lies the master bell-founder himself!
Look! Now the clouds have ceased to hide the moon.
Look, gentlemen! Now! Now! Well—was I right?

THE VICAR.

Indeed you were, my master.

THE BARBER.

'Tis the bell-founder!

[*All three hurry towards* HEINRICH, *but recoil on reaching the edge of the magic ring.*]

THE VICAR.

Oh!

THE BARBER.

Oh!

THE SCHOOLMASTER.

Oh! Oh!

RAUTENDELEIN.

[*Becoming visible for a moment among the trees.*]

Ha! Ha! Ha! Ha! Ha! Ha!

[*She vanishes amid peals of mocking laughter. A pause.*]

THE SCHOOLMASTER [*bewildered*].

What was it?

THE BARBER.

Ay. What was 't?

THE VICAR.

I heard a laugh!

THE SCHOOLMASTER.

The bright light dazzled me. I do believe
It's made a hole in my head as big as my fist.

THE VICAR.

You heard the laughter?

THE BARBER.

Ay, and something cracked.

THE VICAR.

The laughter seemed to come from every pine
That rustles round us in the growing gloom.
There! Yonder! Where the horn-owl hoots and flies!

THE BARBER.

Didn't I tell you of these devilish folk?
O Lord, O Lord! I warned you of their spells.
D'ye think we're safe here? As for me, I quake—
My flesh creeps. Curses on the hag, say I!

THE VICAR.

[*Raising the crucifix which hangs round his neck, and moving steadfastly towards the hut.*]

You may be right. Yet, though the Devil himself
Dwelt here, I'd still say: Courage! On!
Against him we will pit God's Holy Word!
Ah! never yet was Satan's craft more clear
Than when he hurled the Master and the bell
To death—God's servant and his instrument—
The bell that, from the edge of the abyss
Had sung the hymn of everlasting Love,
And Peace, and Mercy, through the firmament!
Here stand we as true soldiers of the Lord!
I'll knock!

THE BARBER.

D—d—don't risk it!

THE VICAR.

Yes! I say, I'll knock!
[*He knocks at the door of the hut.*]

WITTIKIN [*from within the hut*].

Who's there?

THE VICAR.

A Christian!

WITTIKIN.

Christian or no Christian,
What d'you want?

THE VICAR.

Open!

WITTIKIN.

[*Appearing in the doorway carrying a lighted lantern.*]
Well? What's your will?

THE VICAR.

In God's name, woman, whom thou dost not know——

WITTIKIN.

Oho! A pious opening, I declare!

THE SCHOOLMASTER.

Thou carrion-crow, how durst thou wag thy tongue?
The measure's full—thy time is meted out.
Thy evil life and thy accursèd deeds
Have made thee hated through the countryside.
So—an thou do not now as thou art bid—
Ere dawn the red cock* from thy roof shall crow—
Thy den of thieves shall flame and smoke to Heaven!

THE BARBER [*Crossing himself repeatedly*].

Thou wicked cat! I'm not afraid of thee!
Ay—scowl, and glare, and glower, as thou wilt!
Though thy red eyes should light upon my corpse,
They'll find the Cross before them. Do as thou'rt bid!

* In Germany "der rothe Hahn" is a symbol of incendiarism.

Old Wittikin

"Well? What's your will?"—Act I.

THE VICAR.

I charge thee, woman, in God's holy name,
Have done with all thy devilish juggleries,
And help this man! Here lies a child of God,
A Master, gifted with a wondrous art
That him doth honor, while it puts to shame
The damnèd companies of air and Hell.

WITTIKIN.

[*Who has been prowling round* HEINRICH *with her lantern.*]

And, what's all that to do wi' me? Enough!
You're welcome to the creature. Take him hence.
What harm did I to him? For aught I care,
He may live on, till he has spent his breath.
I'll wager that won't be so very long!
Ye name him "Master," and ye love the sound
O' the big iron bells the creature makes.
Ye all are hard o' hearin', or ye'd know
There's no good in his bells. He knows it, too.
Ah, I could tell ye, an' I would, what's wrong.
The best and worst o' them ring false. They're cracked.
There! Take the litter. Bear the man away—
The "Master," as ye call him! Master Milksop!
[*To* HEINRICH.]
Get up! Go home and help the parson preach!
Go—help the schoolmaster to birch his boys—
Go—mix the lather in the barber's shop!

[*The* BARBER *and the* SCHOOLMASTER *lift* HEINRICH *on to the litter.*]

THE VICAR.

Thou wicked, scolding hag! Restrain thy tongue!
Thy way shall lead thee straight to Hell. Begone!

WITTIKIN.

O, spare your sermons. I ha' heard ye preach.
I know, I know. 'Tis sinful to ha' senses.
The earth's a coffin, and the Heavens above

Are but a coffin-lid. The stars are holes;
The sun's a bigger hole in the blue sky.
The world 'ud come to grief wi'out the priests,
And God himself ye'd make a bug-a-boo!
The Lord should take a rod to ye—poor fools!
Ay, fools are ye—all, all! and nothing more!

[*She bangs open her door and goes into hut.*]

THE VICAR.

Thou beldame!

THE BARBER.

For Heaven's sake—don't vex her more!
If you should goad her further, we are lost.

[*Exeunt the* VICAR, *the* SCHOOLMASTER, *and the* BARBER *into the wood, bearing away* HEINRICH *on the litter. The moon shines out, and lights up the peaceful landscape.* FIRST, SECOND, *and* THIRD ELVES *steal out of the wood one after the other and join hands in a dance.*]

FIRST ELF [*whispering*].

Sister!

SECOND ELF [*as above*].

Sister!

FIRST ELF [*as above*].

White and chill
Shines the moon across the hill.
Over bank, and over brae,
Queen she is, and Queen shall stay.

SECOND ELF.

Whence com'st thou?

FIRST ELF.

From where the light
In the waterfall gleams bright,
Where the glowing flood doth leap,
Roaring, down into the deep.

Then, from out the mirk and mist,
Where the foaming torrent hissed,
Past the dripping rocks and spray,
Up I swiftly made my way.

THIRD ELF [*joining them*].

Sisters, is it here ye dance?

FIRST ELF.

Wouldst thou join us? Quick—advance!

SECOND ELF.

And whence com'st thou?

THIRD ELF.

Hark and hist!
Dance, and dance, as ye may list!
'Mid the rocky peaks forlorn
Lies the lake where I was born.
Starry gems are mirrored clear
On the face of that dark mere.
Ere the fickle moon could wane,
Up I swept my silver train.
Where the mountain breezes sigh,
Over clove and crag came I!

FOURTH ELF [*entering*].

Sisters!

FIRST ELF.

Sister! Join the round!

ALL [*together*].

Ring-a-ring-a-ring-around!

FOURTH ELF.

From Dame Holle's flowery brae,
Secretly I stole away.

FIRST ELF.

Wind and wander, in and out!

ALL [*together*].

Ring-a-ring-a-round-about!

[*Lightning and distant thunder.*]

[*Enter suddenly, from the hut,* RAUTENDELEIN. *Clasping her hands behind her head, she watches the dance from the doorway. The moonlight falls full on her.*]

RAUTENDELEIN.

Ho, my fairies!

FIRST ELF.

Hark! A cry!

SECOND ELF.

Owch! My dress is all awry!

RAUTENDELEIN.

Ho, ye fairies!

THIRD ELF.

O, my gown!
Flit and flutter, up and down.

RAUTENDELEIN [*joining in the dance*].

Let me join the merry round.
Ring-a-ring-a-ring-around!
Silver nixey, sweetest maid,
See how richly I'm arrayed.
All of silver, white and rare,
Granny wove my dress so fair.
Thou, my fairy brown, I vow,
Browner far am I than thou.
And, my golden sister fair,
I can match thee with my hair,

In Elf-Land

Now I toss it high—behold,
Thou hast surely no such gold.
Now it tumbles o'er my face:
Who can rival me in grace?

ALL [*together*].

Wind and wander, in and out,
Ring-a-ring-a-round-about!

RAUTENDELEIN.

Into the gulf there fell a bell.
Where is it lying? Will ye tell?

ALL [*together*].

Wind and wander, in and out,
Ring-a-ring-a-round-about!
Daisy and forget-me-not,
Fairy footsteps injure not.

[*Enter the* WOOD-SPRITE, *skipping. Thunder—this time louder. During the following speech, a storm rages—thunder and hail.*]

THE WOOD-SPRITE.

Daisy and forget-me-not
Crush I in the earth to rot.
If the moorland's all a-drip
'Tis because I leap, and skip!
Now the bull doth seek his mate,
Bellows at the stable gate.
And the heifer, sleeping by,
Lifts her head and lows reply.
On the stallion's warm brown hide
Every fly doth seek his bride,
While the midges dance above,
Fill the air with life and love.
See! The ostler woos the maid!
Buss her, fool! Dost fear the jade?
With the rotting straw for bed,

Soft and tender, lo they wed!
Hul'lo! Hul'lo! Heigh-o-hey!
Whisp'ring's over for to-day.
Done the dancing, hushed and chill,
Lusty life is master still!
Be it early, be it late,
Mews the tom-cat, mews its mate.
Nightingale, and thrush, and stork,
Hart, and hare, and hen, and hawk,
Snipe, and quail, and swan, and duck,
Crane, and pheasant, doe and buck,
Beetle, moth, and mole, and louse,
Toad, and frog, and bat, and mouse,
Bee, and gnat, and moth, and fly—
All must love, and all must die!

[*The* WOOD-SPRITE *snatches up one of the* ELVES *and carries her off into the wood. The three other* ELVES *vanish in different directions.* RAUTENDELEIN *remains standing alone and sad, in the middle of the glade. The storm gradually dies away.*]

[THE NICKELMANN *rises from the well, as before.*]

THE NICKELMANN.

Brekekekex!—Brekekekex! Hey! Ho!
Why dost thou stand there?

RAUTENDELEIN.

Thou dear water-sprite—
Alas, I am so sad. So sad am I!

THE NICKELMANN [*mockingly*].

Brekekekex! And which eye hurts thee, dear?

RAUTENDELEIN [*gaily*].

The left eye. But, perhaps, thou think'st I jest?

THE NICKELMANN.

Ay, surely, surely.

RAUTENDELEIN [*pointing to a tear in her eye*].

Look—what can it be?

THE NICKELMANN.

What dost thou mean?

RAUTENDELEIN.

Why—see what's in my eye!

THE NICKELMANN.

What's in thine eye? Come—let me see it close.

RAUTENDELEIN.

A warm, wet, drop has fallen on my lid.

THE NICKELMANN.

The deuce it has! Come nearer—let me see.

RAUTENDELEIN [*holding out the tear to him*].

A tiny, pure, warm, glitt'ring, drop of dew.
There, only see!

THE NICKELMANN.

By Heaven! 'Tis beautiful.
How would it please thee an I took the thing
And set it in a fine, pink shell for thee?

RAUTENDELEIN.

Why, as thou wilt. I'll lay it on the edge
Of the well. What can it be?

THE NICKELMANN.

A wondrous gem!
Within that little globe lies all the pain,
And all the joy, the world can ever know.
'Tis called—a tear!

RAUTENDELEIN.

A tear! . . . I must have wept.
So now at last I've learned what these tears be . . .
O, tell me something!

THE NICKELMANN.

Come to me, dear child!

RAUTENDELEIN.

Not I, forsooth. What good were that to me?
The edge of thine old well is wet and rough;
'Tis overrun with spiders, worms and—worse.
They irk me—all of them. And so dost thou.

THE NICKELMANN.

Brekekekex! I grieve to hear it, dear.

RAUTENDELEIN.

Another of those drops! How strange!

THE NICKELMANN.

More rain!
Behold! Now Father Thor is all ablaze.
The lightnings from his beard fall soft, and blink
Like babies' eyes, setting the misty train
Of rolling clouds aglow with purple flame.
And yonder, near the grey, mark how a flight
Of ravens rushes madly through the night
To keep him company. With every flash
Their wings gleam wetter in the whirling rain.
Hark, child, how thirstily our Mother Earth
Drinks every drop! And how the trees and grass,
The flies and worms, grow glad in the quick light!

[*Lightning.*]

Quorax! Now in the valley! Master! Hail!
Old Thor is kindling a rare Easter fire.
His hammer flares—twelve thousand miles it sweeps!
The church-tower totters—now the belfry cracks!
The smoke pours out! . . .

RAUTENDELEIN.

Enough! Enough! No more!
Come, tell me something else. I'm tired of Thor.

THE NICKELMANN.

Thou saucy sparrow, thou——. Brekekekex!
What ails the creature? When it's stroked—it pecks.
A pretty way to thank one! When you're done,
You're no bit further than ere you'd begun!
Am I not right? . . . Still pouting, eh? . . . Well, well.
What wouldst thou know?

RAUTENDELEIN.

O, nothing. Do but go!

THE NICKELMANN.

Naught thou wouldst know?

RAUTENDELEIN.

Naught!

THE NICKELMANN [*imploringly*].

Then, speak thou, I pray.

RAUTENDELEIN.

I long to leave you all and go away!
[*Her eyes fill with tears and she stares into the distance.*]

THE NICKELMANN [*with anguish*].

What have I done to thee? Where wouldst thou go?
Is it the world of men that thou wouldst know?
I warn thee, maiden. Man's a curious thing,
Who naught but woe to such as thou could bring.
Although, perchance, with ours his fate's entwined,
He is, yet is not quite, of our own kind.
His world is ours—and yet, I say, beware!
Half here, he lives—half, no one could tell where!

Half he's our brother ; yet, this many a day,
A foe he's been, and lost to us for aye.
Woe, woe to all who our free mountains flee
To join these mortals, hoping bliss to see !
Man's feet are in the Earth. In toil and pain
He lives his fleeting life. And yet—he's vain.
He's like a plant that in a cellar shoots,
And needs must pluck and pluck at its own roots.
So, languishing for light, he rots away,
Nor ever knows the joy of one sun-ray.
The breath of Spring that kisses the green leaf,
To sickly boughs brings death, and not relief.
Pry thou no further, but let Man alone :
Lest thou should hang about thy neck—a stone.
Man will but sadden thee with his grey skies,
And turn thy happy laugh to tears and sighs.
Thou shalt be chained unto an ancient Book.
Accurst—no more upon the Sun thou'lt look !

RAUTENDELEIN.

Grandmother says thou art a learned seer.
Yet, an thou wilt but in thy waters peer,
Thou'lt see that never yet a rill did flow
But longed into the world of men to go.

THE NICKELMANN [*angrily*].

Quorax ! Brekekekex ! Be not so bold.
Hear now the words of one ten centuries old !
Let slavish streams pursue their fated way,
Work, wash, for men, and grind their corn each day,
Water their cabbages and garden stuff,
And swallow—Heav'n knows what! And now . . . enough!

[*Warmly and earnestly.*]

But, O, my dear Princess Rautendelein,
For thee a King's chamber were none too fine.
I know a rare crown, all of crystal so green,
In a great golden hall, thou shalt wear it, my queen.
The floor and the roof are of clear blue stone,
Red coral the coffers and chests I own. . .

RAUTENDELEIN.

And what though thy coffers of coral be wrought?
Life lived with the fishes were good for naught.
And though thy King's crown of pure sapphire should be,
Thy daughters should prink it alone with thee.
My own golden tresses are far more dear;
Their touch a caress is; my crown is—here!

[*She turns to go.*]

THE NICKELMANN.

Where art thou going?

RAUTENDELEIN [*airily and indifferently*].

What is that to thee?

THE NICKELMANN [*sorrowfully*].

Much. Much. Brekekekex!

RAUTENDELEIN.

O, whither I will
Go I.

THE NICKELMANN.

And whither wouldst go?

RAUTENDELEIN.

Away and away!

THE NICKELMANN.

Away and away?

RAUTENDELEIN [*flinging her arms aloft*].

To the world—of men!

[*She vanishes in the wood.*]

THE NICKELMANN [*terrified*].

Quorax!

[*Whimpering.*]

Quorax!

[*Softly.*]

Quorax!

[*Shaking his head sadly.*]

Brekekekex!

CURTAIN.

Act Two.

An old-fashioned room in the house of Heinrich *the bell-founder. A deep recess occupies half the back wall. In the recess is a large open fireplace, with a chimney above it. A copper kettle is suspended above the unlighted fire. The other half of the back wall, set at an angle, is lighted by a large old-fashioned window, with bottle-glass panes. Below this window, a bed. Doors R. and L. That on the R. leads to the workshop, while that on the L. leads to the courtyard. L. C. a table and chairs placed. On the table: a full jug of milk, mugs, and a loaf of bread. Near the table, a tub. The room is decorated with works by Adam Kraft, Peter Fischer, etc., conspicuous among them a painted wooden image of Christ on the Cross.*

Discovered: *Seated at the farther side of the table, and, in their Sunday best, the two* Children (*boys*) *of* Heinrich (*aged respectively five and nine*), *with their mugs of milk before them.* Magda, *their mother, also in her Sunday best, enters L., with a bunch of cowslips in her hand.*

Early morning. The light grows brighter as the action progresses.

Magda.

See, children, what I've brought you from the fields!
Beyond the garden—a whole patch grew wild.
Now we can make ourselves look fine and gay,
In honor of your father's birthday feast.

First Child.

O, give me some!

Second Child.

And me!

MAGDA.

There! Five for each!
And every single one they say's a key *
That opens Heaven. Now drink your milk, my dears,
And eat your bread. 'Tis almost time to start.
The road to church, you know, is long and steep.

NEIGHBOR [*a woman*].

[*Looking in at the window.*]

What! Up already, neighbor?

MAGDA [*at the window*].

Yes, indeed.
I hardly closed my eyes the livelong night.
But, 'twas not care that kept me wide-awake.
So now I'm just as fresh as if I'd slept
Sound as a dormouse. Why, how bright it is!

NEIGHBOR.

Ay. Ay. You're right.

MAGDA.

You'll come with us, I hope?
Now don't say no. You'll find it easy walking
On the road . . . These tiny feet
Shall lead the way, and gently mark our steps.
If you must have the truth, I long for wings:
I'm wild to-day with joy and eagerness!

NEIGHBOR.

And has your good-man not been home all night?

MAGDA.

What are you dreaming of? I'll be content
If only the big bell is safely hung
In time to ring the people in to mass!

* In German the cowslip is called "Himmelschlüssel," *i. e.*, "the key of Heaven."

You see—the time was short. They'd none to waste.
And as for sleeping—if the Master snatched
So much as one short wink in the wood-grass—
Why, Heaven be praised! But, oh, what does it matter?
The work was hard: but great is the reward.
You cannot think how pure, and clear, and true,
The new bell sounds. Just wait until you hear
Its voice ring out to-day from the church tower.
'Tis like a prayer, a hymn, a song of praise—
Filling the heart with comfort and with gladness.

NEIGHBOR.

No doubt, ma'am. Yet one thing amazes me.
From my front door, as doubtless you're aware,
The church upon the hill is plainly seen.
Now—I had heard that when the bell was hung
A white flag would be hoisted from the tower.
I've seen no sign of that white flag. Have you?

MAGDA.

O, look again. It must be there by now.

NEIGHBOR.

No, no. It's not.

MAGDA.

Well, even were you right,
It would not frighten me. Did you but know
The fret and toil and pain, by night and day,
It costs the Master to complete his work,
You would not wonder if the final stroke
Should be delayed a bit. I understand.
By this time, I'll be bound, the flag is there.
Why, yes, I'm sure it is, could we but see 't.

NEIGHBOR.

I can't believe it. In the village streets
They do say something dreadful has occurred.

Dark omens, boding evil, fill the air.
But now, a farmer saw a naked witch,
Perched on a boar's back, riding through his corn.
Lifting a stone, he cast it at the hag—
Straightway his hand dropped—palsied to the knuckles!
'Tis said that all the mischievous mountain sprites
Are leagued and up in arms against the bell.
How strange you have not heard all this before!
Well—now the Bailiff's gone into the hills,
With half the village at his heels, to see . . .

MAGDA.

The Bailiff? Merciful God! What can be wrong?

NEIGHBOR.

Why, nothing's certain. All may yet be well.
There—don't take on so, neighbor. Come—be calm!
It's not so bad as that. Now don't 'ee fret.
It seems the wagon and the bell broke down . . .
That's all we've heard.

MAGDA.

Pray Heav'n that be the worst!
What matters one bell more or less! . . . If he,
The Master, be but safe—these flowers may stay.
Yet—till we know what's happened . . . Here, prithee,
Take the two children . . .
[*She lifts the two* CHILDREN *through the window.*]
Will you?

NEIGHBOR.

Why, to be sure.

MAGDA.

Thanks. Take them home with you. And, as for me,
Ah, I must go, as fast as go I can,

To see what may be done—to help. For I
Must be with my dear Master—or, I die!

[*Exit hurriedly.*]

[*The* NEIGHBOR *retires with the* CHILDREN. *Confused noise of voices without. Then a piercing cry from* MAGDA.]

[*Enter quickly the* VICAR, *sighing, and wiping the tears from his eyes. He looks round the room hastily, and turns down the coverlet of the bed. Then, hurrying to the door, he meets the* SCHOOLMASTER *and the* BARBER, *carrying* HEINRICH *in on the litter seen in Act One.* HEINRICH *reclines on a rude bed of green branches.* MAGDA, *half beside herself with anguish, follows, supported by a* MAN *and a* WOMAN. *Crowd of* VILLAGERS *presses in behind* MAGDA. HEINRICH *is laid on his own bed.*]

THE VICAR [*to* MAGDA].

Bear up, my mistress! Put your trust in God!
We laid him on our litter as one dead;
Yet, on the way, he came to life again,
And, as the doctor told us, only now,
Hope's not yet lost.

MAGDA [*moaning*].

Dear God, who speaks of hope?
A moment since, I was so happy! . . . Now—
What's come to me? What's happened? Won't you speak?
Where are the children?

THE VICAR.

Put your trust in God.
Do but have patience, mistress. Patience and faith!
Often—remember—in our direst need
God's help is nearest. And, forget not this:
Should He, of His all-wisdom, have resolved,
In His own time, to call the Master hence,

Still there shall be this comfort for your soul—
Your husband goes from Earth to endless bliss.

MAGDA.

Why do you speak of comfort, reverend Sir?
Do I need comfort? Nay—he will get well.
He must get well.

THE VICAR.

So all of us do hope.
But . . . should he not . . . God's holy will be done.
Come now what may, the Master's fight is won.
To serve the Lord, he fashioned his great bell.
To serve the Lord, he scaled the mountain-heights—
Where the malignant powers of Darkness dwell,
And the Abyss defies the God of Hosts.
Serving the Lord, at last he was laid low—
Braving the hellish spirits in his path.
They feared the gospel that his bell had rung:
So leagued themselves against him, one and all,
In devilish brotherhood. God punish them!

THE BARBER.

A wonder-working woman lives hard by,
Who heals, as the Disciples healed of old,
By prayer and faith.

THE VICAR.

Let some one search for her:
And when she's found, return with her at once.

MAGDA.

What's come to him? Why do you stand and gape?
Off with you all! You shall not stare at him
With your unfeeling eyes. D'you hear? Begone!
Cover him—so—with linen, lest your looks
Should shame the Master. Now—away with you!
Get to the juggler's, if you needs must gape.
Ah, God! What's happened? . . . Are ye all struck dumb?

The Village Home

THE SCHOOLMASTER.

Truly, 'tis hard to tell just what took place.
Whether he tried to stop the bell—or what . . .
This much is certain: if you could but see
How deep he fell, you would go down on your knees
And thank the Lord. For, if your husband lives,
'Tis nothing short of the miraculous!

HEINRICH [*feebly*].

Give me a little water!

MAGDA [*driving out the* VILLAGERS *quickly*].

Out you go!

THE VICAR.

Go, my good people. He has need of rest.

[VILLAGERS *withdraw.*]

If I can serve you, Mistress, why, you know
Where you may find me.

THE BARBER.

Yes, and me.

THE SCHOOLMASTER.

And me.

No. On reflection, I'll stay here.

MAGDA.

You'll go!

HEINRICH.

Give me some water!

[*The* VICAR, SCHOOLMASTER, *and* BARBER *withdraw slowly, talking low, shaking their heads, and shrugging their shoulders.*]

MAGDA [*hastening to* HEINRICH *with water*].

Heinrich, are you awake?

HEINRICH.

I'm parched. Give me some water. Can't you hear?

MAGDA [*unable to control herself*].

Nay, patience.

HEINRICH.

Magda, all too soon I'll learn
What patience means. Bear with me yet a while.
It will not be for long.

[*He drinks.*]

Thanks, Magda. Thanks.

MAGDA.

Don't speak to me so strangely, Heinrich. Don't!
I . . . I'm afraid.

HEINRICH [*fevered and angry*].

Thou must not be afraid.
When I am gone, thou'lt have to live alone.

MAGDA.

I cannot . . . no, I will not . . . live without thee!

HEINRICH.

Thy pain is childish. Torture me no more!
It is unworthy,—for thou art a mother.
Bethink thee what that word means, and be brave!

MAGDA.

Ah, do not be so stern and harsh with me!

HEINRICH [*painfully*].

The plain truth harsh and stern? Again I say—
Thy place is by the bedside of thy boys.
There lies thy joy, thy peace, thy work, thy life.
All—all is tucked up in their fair, white sheets.
Could it be otherwise, 'twere infamous!

MAGDA [*falling on his neck*].

So help me Heav'n, I love thee far, far, more
Than our dear children, and myself, and all!

HEINRICH.

Then woe unto ye all, too soon bereaved!
And thrice-unhappy I, untimely doomed
To snatch the milk and bread from your poor lips!
Yet, on my tongue, I feel them turn to poison.
That, too, is just! . . . Farewell. Thee I commend
To one from whom none living may escape.
Many a man has found Death's deepest shadow
Prove but a welcome light. God grant it be!

[*Tenderly.*]

Give me thy hand. I've done thee many a wrong
By word and deed. Often I've grieved thy heart,
Far, far, too often. But thou wilt forgive me!
I would have spared thee, had I but been free.
I know not what compelled me; yet I know
I could not choose but stab thee—and myself.
Forgive me, Magda!

MAGDA.

I forgive thee? What?
If thou dost love me, Heinrich, be less sad:
Or thou wilt bring the tears back. Rather—scold.
Thou knowest well how dear——

HEINRICH [*painfully*].

I do not know!

MAGDA.

Nay, who, but thou, did wake my woman's soul?
Till thou didst come, I was a poor, dull, clod,
Pining away beneath a cheerless sky.
Thou—thou—didst rescue me and make me live,
Fill me with joy, and set my heart in the sun.
And never did I feel thy love more sure

Than when, with thy strong hand, thou'dst draw my face
Out of the dark, and turn it towards the light.
And thou wouldst have me pardon thee! For what?
Do I not owe thee all I love in life?

HEINRICH.

Strangely entangled seems the web of souls.

MAGDA [*stroking his hair tenderly*].

If I have ever been a help to thee—
If I have sometimes cheered thy working hours—
If favor in thine eyes I ever found . . .
Bethink thee, Heinrich: I, who would have given
Thee everything—my life—the world itself—
I had but that to pay thee for thy love!

HEINRICH [*uneasily*].

I'm dying. That is best. God means it well.
Should I live on . . . Come nearer, wife, and hear me.
'Tis better for us both that I should die.
Thou think'st, because we blossomed out together,
I was the sun that caused thy heart to bloom.
But that the eternal Wonder-Worker wrought,
Who, on the wings of His chill winter-storms,
Rides through a million million woodland flowers,
Slaying them, as He passes, in their Spring!
'Tis better for us both that I should die.
See: I was cracked and ageing—all misshaped.
If the great Bell-Founder who moulded me
Tosses aside His work, I shall not mourn.
When He did hurl me down to the abyss,
After my own poor, faulty, handiwork,
I did not murmur: for my work was bad!
Good-wife—the bell that sank into the mere
Was not made for the heights—it was not fit
To wake the answering echoes of the peaks!

MAGDA.

I cannot read the meaning of thy words.
A work—so highly-prized, so free from flaw,
So clear and true that, when it first rang out
Between the mighty trees from which it hung,
All marveled and exclaimed, as with one voice,
"The Master's bell sings as the Angels sing!"

HEINRICH [*fevered*].

'Twas for the valley, not the mountain-top!

MAGDA.

That is not true! Hadst thou but heard, as I,
The Vicar tell the Clerk, in tones that shook,
"How gloriously 'twill sound upon the heights!" . . .

HEINRICH.

'Twas for the valley—not the mountain-top!
I only know 't. The Vicar does not know.
So I must die—I wish to die, my child.
For, look now: should I heal—as men would call 't—
Thanks to the art of our good village leech,
I'd be at best a botch, a crippled wretch;
And so the warm and generous draught of life—
Ofttimes I've found it bitter, ofttimes sweet,
But ever it was strong, as I did drink 't—
Would turn to a stale, flat, unsavory brew,
Thin and grown cold and sour. I'll none of it!
Let him who fancies it enjoy the draught.
Me it would only sicken and repel.
Hush! Hear me out. Though thou shouldst haply find
A doctor of such skill that he could cure me,
Giving me back my joy—nerving my hand,
Till it could turn to the old, daily task—
Even then, Magda, I were still undone.

MAGDA.

For God's sake, husband, tell me what to think!
What has come over thee—a man so strong,
So blessed, so weighted down with Heaven's best gifts;
Respected, loved, of all—of all admired,
A master of thy craft! . . . A hundred bells
Hast thou set ringing, in a hundred towers.
They sing thy praise, with restless industry;
Pouring the deep, glad, beauty of thy soul
As from a hundred wine-cups, through the land.
At eve, the purple-red—at dawn, God's gold—
Know thee. Of both thou art become a part.
And thou—rich, rich, beyond thy greatest need—
Thou, voicing God—able to give, and give,
Rolling in happiness, where others go
Begging their daily dole of joy or bread—
Thou look'st unthankfully upon thy work!
Then, Heinrich, why must I still bear the life
That thou dost hate so? . . . What is life to me?
What could that be to me which thou dost scorn—
Casting it from thee, like a worthless thing!

HEINRICH.

Mistake me not. Now thou thyself hast sounded
Deeper and clearer than my loudest bells.
And many a one I've made! . . . I thank thee, Magda.
Yet thou shalt understand my thought. Thou must.
Listen! . . . The latest of my works had failed.
With anguished heart I followed where they climbed,
Shouting and cursing loudly, as the bell
Was dragged towards the peak. And then—it fell.
It fell a hundred fathoms deep, ay more,
Into the mere. There, in the mere, now lies
The last and noblest work my art could mould!
Not all my life, as I have lived it, Magda,
Had fashioned, or could fashion, aught so good.
Now I have thrown it after my bad work.
While I lie drinking the poor dregs of life,

Deep in the waters of the lake it's drowned.
I mourn not for what's lost. And then—I mourn:
Knowing this only—neither bell, nor life,
Shall evermore come back. Alas! woe's me!
My heart's desire was bound up in the tones—
The buried tones—I never more shall hear.
And now the life to which I clung so tight
Is turned to bitterness, and grief, and rue,
Madness, and gloom, confusion, pain, and gall!

. . . . .

Well, let life go! The service of the valleys
Charms me no longer, and no more their peace
Calms my wild blood. Since on the peak I stood,
All that I am has longed to rise, and rise,
Cleaving the mists, until it touched the skies!
I would work wonders with the power on high:
And, since I may not work them, being so weak;
Since, even could I, with much straining, rise,
I should but fall again—I choose to die!
Youth—a new youth—I'd need, if I should live:
Out of some rare and magic mountain flower
Marvelous juices I should need to press—
Heart-health, and strength, and the mad lust of triumph,
Steeling my hand to work none yet have dreamed of!

MAGDA.

O Heinrich, Heinrich, did I but know the spot
Where that thou pantest for, the Spring of Youth,
Lies hid, how gladly would these feet of mine
Wear themselves out to find it for thee! Yea,
Even though the waters which restored thy life
Should bring me death!

HEINRICH [*tormented, collapsing and delirious*].

Thou dearest, truest! . . . No, I will not drink!
Keep it! . . . The Spring is full of blood! . . . blood! . . . blood!
I will not! . . . No! . . . Leave me . . . and . . . let me . . . die!
[*He becomes unconscious.*]

[*Enter the* VICAR.]

THE VICAR.

How goes it with the patient, mistress?

MAGDA.

Ill!
Terribly ill! He's sick in every part.
Some strange, mysterious pain's consuming him.
I know not what to fear, and what to hope.
[*Hurriedly throwing a scarf over her shoulders.*]
Did you not speak of a woman who works miracles?

THE VICAR.

I did. Indeed, 'tis that has brought me back.
She lives . . . at most a mile away from here . . .
Her name . . . I can't recall it. But she lives,
If I mistake not, in the pinewood . . . Ay . . .
Her name . . .

MAGDA.

Not Wittikin?

THE VICAR.

How can you ask!
Why, she's a wicked witch, the Devil's dam,
And she must die. By now they're up in arms,
Eager for battle with the pestilent fiend.
With cudgels, torches, stones, they're hurrying fast
To make an end of her. For you must know
She's charged with all the evil that afflicts us.
No. I was thinking of . . . Frau Findeklee . . .
A shepherd's widow . . . and a worthy soul . . .
Her husband left her an old recipe
Which, as I am assured by many here,
Has wondrous virtues. Will you go for her?

MAGDA.

Yes, yes, most reverend Sir!

Virginia Harned as Rautendelein

THE VICAR.

You'll go at once?

[*Enter* RAUTENDELEIN, *disguised as a peasant girl, and carrying a basket of berries in her hand.*]

MAGDA [*to* RAUTENDELEIN].

What wouldst thou, child? . . . Who art thou? . . .

THE VICAR.

Why—'tis Anna,
Anna—the maiden from the wayside inn.
Nay, 'twould be vain to question her. Alas,
She's dumb. A good girl. Ah, she's brought some berries.

MAGDA.

Come here, my child . . . What was't I wished to say . . .
Ah, yes! This man lies sick. When he awakes
Be near to help him. Dost thou understand me?
Frau Findeklee . . . That was the name, you said? . . .
But, no; I cannot go. It is too far.
If you'll stay here a moment, I am sure,
My neighbor will go for me . . . I'll come back.
And don't forget . . . O God, my heart will break!

[*Exit.*]

THE VICAR [*to* RAUTENDELEIN].

Stand here, my child; or, if thou wilt, sit down,
Be good and do the very best thou canst.
Make thyself helpful, while they need thy help.
God will reward thee for the work thou doest.
Thou art greatly changed, dear child, since last I saw thee.
But keep thou honest—be a good, true maid—
For the dear Lord has blessed thee with much beauty.
In truth, my dear, now that I look at thee,
Thou art, yet art not, Anna. As a princess,
Stepped from the pages of some fairy book,
Thou seem'st. So quickly changed! Who would have thought

It possible! Well, well! . . . Thou'lt keep him cool?
He's burning! [*To* HEINRICH] May God bring thee back to health!

[*Exit.*]

[RAUTENDELEIN, *who till now has seemed shy and meek, changes suddenly and bustles about the hearth.*]

RAUTENDELEIN.

Flickering spark in the ash of death,
Glow with life of living breath!
Red, red wind, thy loudest blow!
I, as thou, did lawless grow!
Simmer, sing, and simmer!

[*The flame leaps up on the hearth.*]

. . . . .

Kettle swaying left and right—
Copper-lid, thou'rt none too light!
Bubble, bubble, broth and brew,
Turning all things old to new!
Simmer, sing, and simmer!

. . . . .

Green and tender herbs of Spring,
In the healing draught I fling.
Drink it sweet, and drink it hot—
Life and youth are in the pot!
Simmer, sing, and simmer!

. . . . .

And now to scrape the roots and fetch the water.
The cask is empty . . . But we need more light!

[*She throws the window wide open.*]

A glorious day! But there'll be wind anon.
A mighty cloud, in shape like some huge fish,
Lies on the hills. To-morrow it will burst;
And roystering spirits will ride madly down,
Sweeping athwart the pines, to reach the vale.
Cuckoo! Cuckoo! . . . Here, too, the cuckoo calls,
And the swift swallow darts across the sky . . .

[HEINRICH *has opened his eyes, and lies staring at* RAUTENDELEIN.]

But now to scrape my roots, and fetch the water.
I've much to do since I turned waiting-maid.
Thou, thou, dear flame, shalt cheer me at my work.

HEINRICH [*amazed*].

Tell me . . . who art thou?

RAUTENDELEIN [*quickly and unconcernedly*].

I? Rautendelein.

HEINRICH.

Rautendelein? I never heard that name.
Yet somewhere I have seen thee once before.
Where was it?

RAUTENDELEIN.

Why, 'twas on the mountain-side.

HEINRICH.

True. True. 'Twas there—what time I fevered lay.
I dreamt I saw thee there . . . Again I dream.
At times we dream strange dreams! See. Here's my house.
There burns the fire upon the well-known hearth.
Here lie I, in my bed, sick unto death.
I push the window back. There flies a swallow.
Yonder the nightingales are all at play.
Sweet scents float in—of jasmine . . . elder-blossom . . .
I see . . . I feel . . . I know . . . the smallest thing—
Even to the pattern of this coverlet . . .
Each thread . . . each tiny knot . . . I could describe—
And yet I'm dreaming.

RAUTENDELEIN.

Thou art dreaming? Why?

HEINRICH [*in anguish*].

Because . . . I must be dreaming.

RAUTENDELEIN.

Art thou so sure?

HEINRICH.

Yes. No. Yes. No. I'm wandering. Let me dream on!
Thou askest if I am so sure. I know not.
Ah, be it what it will: or dream, or life—
It is. I feel it, see it—thou dost live!
Real or unreal, within me or without,
Child of my brain, or whatsoe'er thou art,
Still I do love thee, for thou art thyself.
So stay with me, sweet spirit. Only stay!

RAUTENDELEIN.

So long as thou shalt choose.

HEINRICH.

Then . . . I do dream.

RAUTENDELEIN [*familiarly*].

Take care. Dost see me lift this little foot
With the rosy heel? Thou dost? Why, that is well.
Now—here's a hazel nut. I take it—so—
Between my finger and my dainty thumb—
I set my heel on it. Crack! Now, 'tis broken.
Was that a dream?

HEINRICH.

That only God can tell.

RAUTENDELEIN.

Now watch me. See. I'll come quite close to thee,
And sit upon thy bed. So. Here I am! . . .
Feasting away as merrily as thou wilt . . .
Hast thou not room enough?

HEINRICH.

I've all I need.
But tell me whence thou'rt sprung and who has sent thee!
What would'st thou of a broken, suffering, man,
A bundle of sorrow, drawing near the end
Of his brief pilgrimage . . . ?

RAUTENDELEIN.

I like thee.
Whence I did spring I know not—nor could tell
Whither I go. But Granny said one day
She found me lying in the moss and weeds.
A hind did give me suck. My home's the wood,
The mountain-side, the crag, the storm-swept moor—
Where the wind moans and rages, shrieks and groans,
Or purrs and mews, like some wild tiger-cat!
There thou wilt find me, whirling through the air;
There I laugh loud and shout for sheer mad joy;
Till faun and nixey, gnome and water-sprite,
Echo my joy and split their sides with laughter.
I'm spiteful when I'm vexed, and scratch and bite:
And who should anger me had best beware.
Yet—'tis no better when I'm left alone:
For good and bad in me's all mood and impulse.
I'm thus, or thus, and change with each new whim.
But thee I am fond of . . . Thee I would not scratch.
And, if thou wilt, I'll stay. Yet were it best
Thou camest with me to my mountain home.
Then thou should'st see how faithfully I'd serve thee.
I'd show thee diamonds, and rubies rare,
Hid at the bottom of unfathomed deeps.
Emeralds, and topazes, and amethysts—
I'd bring thee all—I'd hang upon thy lids!
Froward, unruly, lazy, I may be;
Spiteful, rebellious, wayward, what thou wilt!
Yet thou shouldst only need to blink thine eye,
And ere thou'dst time to speak, I'd nod thee—yes.
And Granny tells me . . .

HEINRICH.

Ah, thou dear, dear child.
Tell me, who is thy Granny?

RAUTENDELEIN.

Dost thou not know?

HEINRICH.

No.

RAUTENDELEIN.

Not know Granny?

HEINRICH.

No, I am a man,
And blind.

RAUTENDELEIN.

Soon thou shalt see! To me is given
The power to open every eye I kiss
To the most hidden mysteries of earth
And air.

HEINRICH.

Then . . . kiss me!

RAUTENDELEIN.

Thou'lt keep still?

HEINRICH.

Nay, try me!

RAUTENDELEIN [*kissing his eyes*].

Ye eyes, be opened!

HEINRICH.

Ah, thou lovely child,
Sent to enchant me in my dying hour—
Thou fragrant blossom, plucked by God's own hand
In the forgotten dawn of some dead Spring—
Thou free, fair, bud—ah, were I but that man
Who, in the morn of life, fared forth so glad—
How I would press thee to this leaping heart!
Mine eyes were blinded. Now, they're filled with light,
And, as by instinct, I divine thy world.
Ay, more and more, as I do drink thee in,
Thou dear enigma, I am sure I see.

RAUTENDELEIN.

Why—look at me, then, till thine eyes are tired.

HEINRICH.

How golden gleams thy hair! How dazzling bright! . . .
With thee for company, thou dearest dream,
Old Charon's boat becomes a bark for kings,
That spreads its purple sails to catch the sun
Lighting it eastward on its stately way.
Feel'st thou the Western breeze that creeps behind us,
Flecking with foam from tiny waterfalls
The swelling bosom of the blue South seas,
And showering diamonds on us? Dost thou not feel it?
And we, reclining here on cloth of gold,
In blissful certitude of what must be,
Do scan the distance that divides us twain . . .
Thou knowest well from what! . . . For thou hast seen
The fair green island, where the birch bends down,
Bathing its branches in the azure flood—
Thou hearest the glad song of all Spring's choirs,
Waiting to welcome us . . .

RAUTENDELEIN.

Yes! Yes! I hear it!

HEINRICH [*collapsing*].

So be it. I am ready. When I awake,
A voice shall say to me—Come thou with me.
Then fades the light! . . . Here now the air grows chill.
The seer dies, as the blind man had died.
But I have seen thee . . . seen . . . thee . . . !

RAUTENDELEIN [*with incantations*].

Master, sleep is thine!
When thou wakest, thou art mine.
Happy dreams shall dull thy pain,
Help to make thee whole again.

[*She bustles about by the hearth.*]

Hidden treasures, now grow bright!
In the depths ye give no light.
Glowing hounds in vain do bark,
Whine and whimper in the dark!
We, who serve him, glad will be:
For the Master sets us free!
[*Addressing* HEINRICH, *and with gestures.*]
One, two, three. A new man be!
For the future thou art free!

HEINRICH [*awaking*].

What's happened to me? . . . From what wondrous sleep
Am I aroused? . . . What is this glorious sun
That, streaming through the window, gilds my hand?
O, breath of morning! Heaven, if 'tis thy will—
If 'tis thy strength that rushes through my veins—
If, as a token of thy power, I feel
This strange, new, beating heart within my breast?
Then, should I rise again—again I'd long
To wander out into the world of life:
And wish, and strive, and hope, and dare, and do . . .
And do . . . and do . . . !

[RAUTENDELEIN *has meanwhile moved to L. and stands, leaning against the wall, gazing fixedly at* HEINRICH. *A dazzling light falls on her face. Enter* MAGDA.]

Ah, Magda. Is it thou?

MAGDA.

Is he awake?

HEINRICH.

Yes, Magda. Is it thou?

MAGDA [*delightedly*].

How is it with thee?

HEINRICH [*overcome with emotion*].

Well. Ah, well! I'll live!
I feel it. I shall live . . . Yes! I shall . . . live!

[*As he speaks, he gazes fixedly, not at* MAGDA, *but at* RAUTENDELEIN, *who stands in an elfin attitude, looking toward him, with an unnatural light on her face.*]

MAGDA.

[*Overjoyed and embracing* HEINRICH, *who seems unconscious of her presence.*]

He lives! He lives! O dearest Heinrich! Dearest!

CURTAIN.

Act Three.

A deserted glass-works in the mountains, near the snow fields. L., an earthenware pipe, through which water from the natural rock runs into a natural stone trough. R., a "practicable" smith's forge, with chimney and bellows. Through the open entrance to the glass-works at back, R., is seen a mountain landscape, with peaks, moors, and dense fir-woods. Close to the entrance is a precipitous descending slope. In the roof is an outlet for the smoke. L., the rock forms a rude, pointed vault.

Discovered: The Wood-Sprite. *After throwing a stump on a heap of pinewood outside, he enters, reluctantly, and looks round.* The Nickelmann *rises from the water-trough, remaining immersed up to his breast.*

The Nickelmann.

Brekekekex! Come in!

The Wood-Sprite.

Ah, there thou art!

The Nickelmann.

Ay. Plague upon this nasty smoke and soot!

The Wood-Sprite.

Have they gone out?

The Nickelmann.

Have who gone out?

The Wood-Sprite.

Why—they.

THE NICKELMANN.

Yes. I suppose so. Else they would be here.

THE WOOD-SPRITE.

I've seen old Horny.

THE NICKELMANN.

Ugh!

THE WOOD-SPRITE.

. . . With saw and axe.

THE NICKELMANN.

What did he say?

THE WOOD-SPRITE.

He said . . thou croakedst much.

THE NICKELMANN.

Then let the booby keep his ears closed tight.

THE WOOD-SPRITE.

And then he said . . . thou quackedst dismally.

THE NICKELMANN.

I'll wring his neck for him.

THE WOOD-SPRITE.

And serve him right!

THE NICKELMANN.

More necks than one I'd wring—

THE WOOD-SPRITE [*laughing*].

Accursèd wight!
He crowds us from our hills. He hacks and hews,
Digs up our metals, sweats, and smelts, and brews.
The earth-man and the water-sprite he takes
To drag his burdens, and, to harness, breaks.

Our fairest elf's his sweetheart. As for us,
We must stand by, and watch them—as they buss.
She steals my cherished flowers, my red-brown ores,
My gold, my precious stones, my resinous stores.
She serves him like a slave, by night and day.
'Tis he she kisses—us she keeps at bay.
Naught stands against him. Ancient trees he fells.
The earth quakes at his tread, and all the dells
Ring with the echo of his thunderous blows.
His crimson smithy furnace glows and shines
Into the depths of my most secret mines.
What he is up to, only Satan knows!

THE NICKELMANN.

Brekekekex! Hadst thou the creature slain,
A-rotting in the mere long since he had lain—
The maker of the bell, beside the bell.
And so when next I had wished to throw the stones,
The bell had been my box—the dice, his bones!

THE WOOD-SPRITE.

By cock and pie! That, truly, had been well.

THE NICKELMANN.

But, as it is, he's hale and strong, and works.
Each hammer-stroke my marrow thrills and irks.
[*Whimpering.*]
He makes her rings, and chains, and bracelets rare—
Kisses her neck, her breast, her golden hair.

THE WOOD-SPRITE.

Now, by my goaty face, thou must be crazed.
An old chap whine and whimper? I'm amazed.
He has a fancy for the child? What then?
'Tis plain she does not love you water-men.
Cheer up! Although she shall not be thy bride,
The sea is deep: the earth is long and wide.

The Nickelmann

Catch some fair nixey, and your passion slake.
Live like a pacha : riot—be a rake !
Soon thou'lt be cured : and when they hie to bed,
Thou wilt not even turn to wag thy head.

THE NICKELMANN.

I'll have his blood, I say ! . . .

THE WOOD-SPRITE.

She dotes on him.
Thou'rt powerless.

THE NICKELMANN.

I'll tear him limb from limb !

THE WOOD-SPRITE.

She will not have thee, and thy rage is vain.
While Granny stands his friend, thy cries of pain
Will all be wasted. Ay, this loving pair
Is closely guarded. Patience ! and beware !

THE NICKELMANN.

Patience ? I hate the word !

THE WOOD-SPRITE.

Time runs on fast :
And men are men. Their passion is soon past.

RAUTENDELEIN [*heard singing without*].

A beetle sat in a tree !
Zum ! Zum !
A coat all black and white had he !
Zum ! Zum !

[*She enters.*]

Oho ! We've company. Godden to you,
Hast washed that gold for me, good Nickelmann ?
Hast brought the pine-stumps, as I ordered thee,
Dear Goat's-Foot ? . . . See : I bend beneath the weight
Of the rare treasures I have found to-day.
Oh, I'm no laggard when I set to work !

Here I have diamonds : here, crystals clear.
This little bag is filled with gold-dust. Look !
And here is honeycomb . . . How warm it grows !

THE NICKELMANN.

Warm days are followed by still warmer nights.

RAUTENDELEIN.

Maybe. Cold water is thine element :
So get thee whence thou cam'st, and cool thyself.
[*The* WOOD-SPRITE *laughs.*]
[*The* NICKELMANN *sinks silently down into his trough and disappears.*]
He will not stop until he's angered me.

THE WOOD-SPRITE [*still laughing*].

Ods bobs !

RAUTENDELEIN.

My garter's twisted at the knee !
It cuts me. Oh !

THE WOOD-SPRITE.

Shall I untwist it, dear ?

RAUTENDELEIN.

A pretty page thou'dst make ! . . . No. Go away.
Thou bring'st ill smells with thee . . . and oh, the gnats !
Why, they are swarming round thee now, in clouds.

THE WOOD-SPRITE.

I love them better than the butterflies
That flap their dusty wings about thy face,
Now hanging on thy lips—now on thy hair,
Or clinging to thy hip and breast at night.

RAUTENDELEIN [*laughing*].

There ! That will do. Enough !

THE WOOD-SPRITE.

A happy thought!
Give me this cart-wheel. How did it come here?

RAUTENDELEIN.

That thou couldst answer best, thou mischievous rogue.

THE WOOD-SPRITE.

Had I not broken down the dray, I trow,
Thy falcon were not now meshed in thy net.
So give me thanks—and let me take the thing.
I'll have it tied with ropes, and smeared with pitch,
And when it's lighted, I will roll it down
The steepest hillside. Ah! That were a joke!

RAUTENDELEIN.

Not for the village-folk. Their huts would flame.

THE WOOD-SPRITE.

The flame of sacrifice! The red, red wind!

RAUTENDELEIN.

But I'll not hear of it. So—get thee gone!

THE WOOD-SPRITE.

Thou'rt in a hurry? . . . Must I really go?
Then tell me first—what is the Master doing?

RAUTENDELEIN.

He's working a great work!

THE WOOD-SPRITE.

Ah, yes, no doubt!
We know how bells are cast: by day
Ye work—at night, ye kiss and play.
Hill pines for dale, dale pines for hill,
Then, quick, the Master works his will:
A bastard thing, half brute, half God—
The pride of Earth—to Heaven a clod.

Come to the hazelwoods with me!
What he could be to thee, I'll be.
No elf need hope for greater honor—
Thou canst not rival—the Madonna!

RAUTENDELEIN.

Thou beast! Thou rogue! I'll blind thy thankless eyes,
Should'st thou not cease that Master to despise
Whose hammer, clanging through the dark, long night,
Strikes to redeem thee! . . . For, without his might,
Thou, I, and all of our unhappy race,
Are curst, and kept beyond the pale of grace.
Yet, stay! . . . Be what thou wilt, thy strength is vain.
Here he, the Master, and his will, must reign!

THE WOOD-SPRITE.

What's that to me? . . . My greeting to thy love.
Some day, thou'lt see, I'll be thy turtle-dove.
[*Exit laughing. Short pause.*]

RAUTENDELEIN.

What ails me? . . . Here the air seems close and warm.
I'll hie to some cool grot beside the snow.
The dripping water, green and cold as ice,
Will soon refresh me . . . To-day I trod on a snake,
As it lay sunning itself on a green stone.
It bit at me—up yonder by the falls.
Heigho! How close it is! . . . Steps! . . . Hark! Who comes?
[*Enter the* VICAR, *in mountain costume. He pants for breath as he stands outside the door.*]

THE VICAR.

Ho! Master Barber! Follow me. This way!
The road was rough. But here I stand, at last.
Well, well. I've come to do God's own good work.
My pains will be repaid a hundred-fold
If, like the Blessèd Shepherd, I should find

One poor, lost sheep, and bring him safely home.
So, courage! Courage! [*He enters.*] Is there no one here?
[*He sees* RAUTENDELEIN.]
Ah, there thou art. I might have known as much!

RAUTENDELEIN [*pale and angry*].

What do you seek?

THE VICAR.

That thou shalt quickly learn.
Ay, soon enough, as God shall be my witness.
Give me but time to get my breath again
And dry my face a bit. And now, my child—
I pray thee, tell me—art thou here alone?

RAUTENDELEIN.

Thou hast no right to question me!

THE VICAR.

Oho!
A pretty answer, truly. But thou art frank—
Thou showest me thy very self at once.
So much the better. Now my course is plain.
Thou creature! . . .

RAUTENDELEIN.

Man, beware!

THE VICAR.

[*Folding his hands and approaching her.*]
I fear thee not!
My heart is pure and true. Thou canst not harm me.
He who did give my poor old limbs the strength
To brave thee in thy hidden mountain home
Will not forsake me now. Thou devilish thing,
Think not to daunt me with thy scornful glance—
Waste thy infernal witchcraft not on me!
Thou—thou hast lured him hither—to thy hills!

RAUTENDELEIN.

Whom?

THE VICAR.

Whom? Why, Master Heinrich. Canst thou ask?
With magic spells, and sweet unhallowed draughts,
Thou hast witched him, till he obeys thee like a dog.
A man so upright, pious to the core;
A father and a husband! Thou great God!
This mountain trull had but to raise her hand
And, in a trice, she had tied him to her skirts,
Dragged him away with her, where'er she pleased,
Shaming the honor of all Christendom.

RAUTENDELEIN.

If I'm a robber, 'twas not thou I robbed!

THE VICAR.

What! 'Tis not I thou hast robbed? Thou insolent jade,
Not me alone, not only his wife and boys—
No—all mankind thou hast cheated of this man!

RAUTENDELEIN.

[*Suddenly transformed and in triumph.*]
Ah, look before thee! See who comes this way!
Dost thou not hear the free and even sound
Of his firm footsteps? Shall thy sland'rous flouts
Not even now be turned to joyous shouts?
Dost thou not feel my Balder's conqu'ring glance
Dart through thy soul, and stir thee, as the dance?
The grass his foot treads down is proud and glad.
A King draws nigh! Thou, beggarly wretch, art sad?
Hail! Hail! O Master, Master! Thee I greet!

[*She runs to meet* HEINRICH, *and throws herself into his arms as he enters.*]

[HEINRICH *is attired in a picturesque working costume. In his hand he holds a hammer. He enters hand in hand with* RAUTENDELEIN, *and recognizes the* VICAR.]

HEINRICH.

Welcome! Thrice welcome, friend!

THE VICAR.

Now God be praised!
Belovèd Master: is it yourself I see?
You, who but lately came so near to death,
Now stand before me, beaming with rude strength,
Straight as a stout young beech, and hale and well—
You, who did seem a sickly, tottering man,
Hopeless, and ageing? What has wrought this change?
How, in a moment, has the grace of God,
With but a puff of His all-quickening breath,
Helped you to spring from your sick-bed to life,
Ready to dance, as David danced, and sing,
Praising the Lord, your Saviour and your King!

HEINRICH.

'Tis even as you say.

THE VICAR.

You are a marvel!

HEINRICH.

That also is true. In all my frame I feel
Wonders are being worked.
[*To Rautendelein.*]
Go thou, my dear.
The Vicar must be thirsty. Bring some wine.

THE VICAR.

I thank you. But—I will not drink to-day.

HEINRICH.

Go. Bring the wine. I'll vouch for it. 'Tis good.
Well—as you please. I pray you, do not stand.
This is my first encounter with a friend

Since I released myself from the distress
And shame that sickness brings. I had not hoped
To welcome you, before all others, here—
Within the narrow sphere that bounds my work.
Now am I doubly glad : for now 'tis clear
You have learned what strength, and love, and duty mean.
I see you breaking, with one resolute blow,
The murderous chains of worldly interest—
Fleeing mankind, to seek the one true God.

THE VICAR.

Now, God be thanked ! You are the old, true, Heinrich
They lied, who, in the valley, had proclaimed
You were no more the man that once we knew.

HEINRICH.

That man am I, and yet . . . another man.
Open the windows—Light and God stream in !

THE VICAR.

A goodly saying.

HEINRICH.

Ay. The best I know.

THE VICAR.

I know some better. Yet your saying's good.

HEINRICH.

Then, if you are ready, give me your right hand.
I swear, by Cock and Swan and Head of Horse,
With all my soul to serve you as your friend.
I'll open to you wide the gates of Spring—
The Spring that fills my heart.

THE VICAR.

Do as you say.
'Twill not be the first time. You know me well.

HEINRICH.

I know you. Yes. And though I knew you not,
Yea, though a vulgar soul your face should hide,
So boundless is my craving to do good,
That I——. Enough. Gold always will be gold.
And even on the souls of sycophants
Good seed's not wasted.

THE VICAR.

Master, tell me this:
What was the meaning of your curious oath?

HEINRICH.

By Cock and Swan?

THE VICAR.

Ay; and by Head of Horse?

HEINRICH.

I know not how the words came to my lips . . .
Methinks . . . the weathercock on your church steeple—
The horse's head upon your neighbor's roof—
The swan that soared into the bright blue sky—
Or . . . something else—was in my mind just then.
What does it matter? . . . Ah, here comes the wine.
Now, in the deepest sense of every word,
I drink to our good health—to thine and mine.

THE VICAR.

I thank you: and once more I wish good health
To him who has so wondrously been healed.

HEINRICH [*pacing to and fro*].

Yes. I am healed—indeed. I feel it here—
Here, in my breast, that swells as I draw in
Strength and new rapture with each living breath.

It is as though the very youth of May
Gladdened my heart and streamed into my being.
I feel it in my arm—'tis hard as steel;
And in my hand, that, as the eagle's claw,
Clutches at empty air, and shuts again,
Wild with impatience to achieve great deeds.
Saw you the sanctuary in my garden?

THE VICAR.

What do you mean?

HEINRICH.

There! . . . 'Tis another marvel.
Look!

THE VICAR.

I see nothing.

HEINRICH.

I mean yonder tree,
That seems so like a glowing evening-cloud.
For the god Freyr once rested in its boughs.
From its green branches, and from round its stem,
Comes the voluptuous hum of countless bees—
Hark how they buzz and swarm about the flowers
Eager to sip sweet draughts from every leaf!
I feel that I am like that wondrous tree . . .
Even as he came down into those boughs,
So did the god descend into my soul,
And, in an instant, it was all a-bloom.
If any bees go thirsting, let them suck!

THE VICAR.

Go on, go on, my friend. I love to listen.
You and your blossoming tree indeed may boast.
Whether your fruit shall ripen, rests with God!

HEINRICH.

Surely, dear friend. Does He not order all?
He hurled me down the precipice. 'Twas He
Who raised me up and caused my life to bloom.
He made the fruit, and flowers, and all that grows.
Yet—pray that He may bless my new-born Summer!
What's germed within me's worthy of the blessing—
Worthy of ripening: really and indeed.
It is a work like none I had yet conceived;
A chime, of all the noblest metals wrought,
That, of itself, shall ring and, ringing, live.
If I but put my hand up to my ear,
Straightway I hear it sing. I close my eyes—
Bell after bell at once grows palpable.
Behold. What now is freely given to me,
Of old—when ye were wont to acclaim me "Master"—
In nameless agony, I vainly sought.
I was no Master then, nor was I happy.
Now am I both; I am happy and a Master!

THE VICAR.

I love to hear men call you by that name.
Yet it seems strange that you yourself should do so.
For what church are you making your great work?

HEINRICH.

For no church.

THE VICAR.

Then—who ordered it, my friend?

HEINRICH.

He who commanded yonder pine to rise
In strength and majesty beside the abyss! . . .
But—seriously: the little church you had built
Lies half in ruins—half it has been burned.
So I must find a new place on the heights:
A new place, for a new, a nobler, temple!

THE VICAR.

O, Master, Master! . . . But, I will not argue.
Perchance we have misunderstood each other.
To put things plainly, what I mean is this:
As your new work must cost so very dear . . .

HEINRICH.

Yes. It is costly.

THE VICAR.

Such a chime as yours . . .

HEINRICH.

Oh, call it what you will.

THE VICAR.

You said—a chime?

HEINRICH.

A name I gave to that which none may name,
Nor can, nor shall baptize, except itself.

THE VICAR.

And tell me, pray—who pays you for your work?

HEINRICH.

Who pays me for my work? Oh, Father! Father!
Would you give joy to joy—add gold to gold? . . .
If I so named it, and the name you love—
Call my great work—a chime! . . . But 'tis a chime
Such as no minster in the world has seen.
Loud and majestic is its mighty voice.
Even as the thunder of a storm it sounds,
Rolling and crashing o'er the meads in Spring.
Ay, in the tumult of its trumpet-tones,
All the church-bells on earth it shall strike dumb.
All shall be hushed, as through the sky it rings

The glad new Gospel of the new-born light!

. . . . .

Eternal Sun!* Thy children, and my children,
Know thee for Father, and proclaim thy power.
Thou, aided by the kind and gentle rain,
Didst raise them from the dust and give them health!
So now—their joy triumphant they shall send
Singing along thy clear, bright, path to Heaven!
And now, at last, like the grey wilderness
That thou hast warmed, and mantled with thy green,
Me thou hast kindled into sacrifice!
I offer thee myself, and all I am! . . .
O Day of Light—when, from the marble halls
Of my fair Temple, the first waking peal
Shall shake the skies—when, from the sombre clouds
That weighed upon us through the winter night,
Rivers of jewels shall go rushing down
Into a million hands outstretched to clutch!
Then all who drooped, with sudden power inflamed,
Shall bear their treasure homeward to their huts,
There to unfurl, at last, the silken banners,
Waiting—so long, so long—to be upraised,
And, pilgrims of the Sun, draw near the Feast!

. . . . .

O, Father, that great Day! . . . You know the tale
Of the lost Prodigal? . . . It is the Sun
That bids his poor, lost, children to my Feast.
With rustling banners, see the swelling host
Draw nearer, and still nearer to my Temple.
And now the wondrous chime again rings out,
Filling the air with such sweet, passionate sound
As makes each breast to sob with rapturous pain.
It sings a song, long lost and long forgotten,
A song of home—a childlike song of Love,
Born in the waters of some fairy well—
Known to all mortals, and yet heard of none!

* In the German the Sun is feminine. The original passage has consequently been modified.

And as it rises, softly first, and low,
The nightingale and dove seem singing, too;
And all the ice in every human breast
Is melted, and the hate, and pain, and woe,
Stream out in tears.

. . . . .

Then shall we all draw nearer to the Cross,
And, still in tears, rejoice, until at last
The dead Redeemer, by the Sun set free,
His prisoned limbs shall stir from their long sleep,
And, radiant with the joy of endless youth,
Come down, Himself a youth, into the May!

[HEINRICH'S *enthusiasm has swelled as he has spoken the foregoing speech, till at last it has become ecstatic. He walks to and fro.* RAUTENDELEIN, *who has been silently watching him all this time, showing her love and adoration by the changing expression of her face, now approaches* HEINRICH, *with tears in her eyes, kneels beside him, and kisses his hand. The* VICAR *has listened to* HEINRICH *with growing pain and horror. Towards the end of* HEINRICH'S *speech he has contained himself with difficulty. After a brief pause he answers. At first he speaks with enforced calm. Gradually, however, his feeling carries him away.*]

THE VICAR.

And now, dear Master, I have heard you out:
Now every syllable those worthy men
Had told me of your state, alas, is proved.
Yea, even to the story of this chime of bells.
I cannot tell you all the pain I feel! . . .
A truce to empty words! If here I stand,
'Tis not because I thirsted for your marvels.
No! 'Tis to help you in your hour of need!

HEINRICH.

My need? . . . And so you think I am in need?

Heinrich on the Heights

"I offer thee myself, and all I am!"—Act III.

THE VICAR.

Man! Man! Bestir yourself. Awake! You dream!
A dreadful dream, from which you'll surely wake
To everlasting sorrow. Should I fail
To rouse you, with God's wise and holy words,
You are lost, ay, lost for ever, Master Heinrich!

HEINRICH.

I do not think so.

THE VICAR.

What saith the Good Book?*
"Those whom He would destroy, He first doth blind."

HEINRICH.

If God so willed it—you'd resist in vain.
Yet, should I own to blindness,
Filled as I feel myself with pure, new life,
Bedded upon a glorious morning cloud,
Whence with new eyes I drink in all the heavens;
Why, then, indeed, I should deserve God's curse,
And endless Darkness.

THE VICAR.

Master Heinrich—friend,
I am too humble to keep pace with you.
A simple man am I—a child of Earth:
The superhuman lies beyond my grasp.
But one thing I do know, though you forget,
That wrong is never right, nor evil, good.

HEINRICH.

And Adam did not know so much in Eden!

*So it stands in the original.

THE VICAR.

Fine phrases, sounding well, but meaningless.
They will not serve to cloak your deadly sin.
It grieves me sore—I would have spared you this.
You have a wife, and children . . .

HEINRICH.

Well—what more?

THE VICAR.

You shun the church, take refuge in the mountains;
This many a month you have not seen the home
Where your poor wife sits sighing, while, each day,
Your children drink their lonely mother's tears!

[*A long pause.*]

HEINRICH [*with emotion*].

Could I but wipe away those sorrowful tears,
How gladly would I do it! . . . But I cannot.
In my dark hours, I've digged into my soul,
Only to feel, I have no power to dry them.
I, who am now all love, in love renewed,
Out of the overflowing wealth I own,
May not fill up their cup! For, lo, my wine
Would be to them but bitter gall and venom!
Should he whose hand is as the eagle's claw
Stroke a sick child's wet cheek? . . . Here none but God
Could help!

THE VICAR.

For this there is no name but madness,
And wicked madness. Yes. I speak the truth.
Here stand I, Master, overcome with horror
At the relentless cruelty of your heart.
Now Satan, aping God, hath dealt a blow—
Yes, I must speak my mind—a blow so dread
That even he must marvel at his triumph.

That work, Almighty God, whereof he prates—
Do I not know 't? . . . 'Tis the most awful crime
Ever was hatched within a heathen brain!
Far rather would I see the dreadful plagues
Wherewith the Lord once scourged rebellious Egypt
Threaten our Christendom, than watch your Temple
Rise to the glory of Beelzebub.
Awake! Arise! Come back, my son, to Christ!
It is not yet too late! Cast out this witch!
Renounce this wanton hag—ay, cast her out!
This elf, this sorceress, this cursèd sprite!
Then in a trice, the evil spell shall fade
And vanish into air. You shall be saved!

HEINRICH.

What time I fevered lay, a prey to death,
She came, and raised me up, and made me well.

THE VICAR.

'Twere better you had died—than live like this!

HEINRICH.

Why, as to that, think even as you will.
But, as for me—I took life's burden up.
I live anew, and, till death comes, must thank
Her who did give me life.

THE VICAR.

Now—I have done!
Too deep, yea to the neck, you are sunk in sin!
Your Hell, decked out in beauty as high Heaven,
Shall hold you fast. I will not waste more words.
Yet mark this, Master: witches make good fuel,
Even as heretics, for funeral-pyres.
Vox populi, vox Dei! Your ill deeds,
Heathen, and secret once, are now laid bare.
Horror they wake, and soon there shall come hate.

So it may happen that the storm, long-curbed,
All bounds shall overleap, and that the people
Whom you have outraged in their holiest faith,
Shall rise against you in their own defence,
And crush you ruthlessly!

[*Pause.*]

HEINRICH [*calmly*].

And now hear me . . .
I fear you not! . . . Should they who panting lie
Dash from my hand the cup of cooling wine
I bore to them: if they would rather thirst—
Why, then, it is their will—perhaps their fate—
And none may justly charge me with their act.
I am no longer thirsty. I have drunk.
If it is fitting that, of all men, you—
Who have closed your eyes against the truth—should be
That man who now assails so hatefully
The blameless cup-bearer, and flings the mud
Of Darkness 'gainst his soul, where all is light:
Yet I am I! . . . What I would work, I know.
And if, ere now, full many a faulty bell
My stroke has shattered, once again will I
Swing my great hammer, for a mightier blow,
Dealt at another bell the mob has made—
Fashioned of malice, gall, and all ill things,
Last but not least among them ignorance.

THE VICAR.

Then, go your way! Farewell. My task is done.
The hemlock of your sin no man may hope
To rid your soul of. May God pity you!
But this remember! There's a word named rue!
And some day, some day, as your dreams you dream,
A sudden arrow, shot from out the blue,
Shall pierce your breast! And yet you shall not die,
Nor shall you live. In that dread day you'll curse
All you now cherish—God, the world, your work,
Your wretched self you'll curse. Then . . think of me!

HEINRICH.

Had I a fancy to paint phantoms, Vicar,
I'd be more skilful in the art than you.
The things you rave of never shall come true,
And I am guarded well against your arrow.
No more it frets me, nor my heart can shake,
Than that old bell, which in the water rolled—
Where it lies buried now, and hushed—forever!

THE VICAR.

That bell shall ring again! Then think of me!

CURTAIN.

Act Four.

Scene: *The glass-works as in Act Three. A rude door has been hewn out of the rocky wall, L. Through this, access is obtained to a mountain-cave. R., the open forge, with bellows and chimney. The fire is lighted. Near the forge stands an anvil.*

Discovered: Heinrich, *at the anvil, on which he is laying a bar of red-hot iron which he holds tight with his tongs. Near him stand six little* Dwarfs *attired as mountaineers. The* First Dwarf *holds the tongs with* Heinrich; *the* Second Dwarf *lifts the great forge hammer and brings it down with a ringing blow on the iron. The* Third Dwarf *works the bellows. The* Fourth Dwarf *stands motionless, intently watching the progress of the work. The* Fifth Dwarf *stands by, waiting. In his hand he holds a club, ready to strike. The* Sixth Dwarf *sits perched on the stump of a tree. On his head he wears a glittering crown. Here and there lie fragments of forged iron and castings, models and plans.*

Heinrich [*to* Second Dwarf].

Strike hard! Strike harder! Till thy arm hangs limp.
Thy whimpering does not move me, thou poor sluggard—
Shouldst thou relax before the time I set,
I'll singe thy beard for thee in these red flames.

[Second Dwarf *throws his hammer down.*]

Oho! I thought as much. Well, wait, thou imp!
What I have threatened thou shalt see I mean.

[Second Dwarf *struggles and screams as* Heinrich *holds him over the fire.* Third Dwarf *goes to work more busily than ever at the bellows.*]

Heinrich's Workshop

FIRST DWARF [*with the tongs*].

I can't hold on. My hand is stiff, great Master!

HEINRICH.

I'm coming.

[*He turns to* SECOND DWARF.]

Well, dost thou feel stronger now?

[SECOND DWARF *nods reassuringly, and hammers away for dear life.*]

HEINRICH.

By Cock and Swan! I'll have no mercy on you!

[*He clutches the tongs again.*]

No blacksmith living could a horseshoe shape
An he should stand on trifles with such rogues.
No sooner have they struck the first good stroke
When off they'd go, and leave the rest to chance.
And as for counting on them for the zeal
That spurs an honest workman to attempt
Ten thousand miracles—why, 'twould be mad.
To work! To work! Hot iron bends—not cold!

[*To* FIRST DWARF.]

What art thou at?

FIRST DWARF.

[*Busily trying to mould the red-hot iron with his hand.*]

I'm moulding it with my hand.

HEINRICH.

Thou reckless fool. What? Hast thou lost thy wits?
Wouldst thou reduce thy clumsy paw to ashes?
Thou wretched dwarf, if thou shouldst fail me now,
What power had I? . . . Without thy helping art,
How could I hope to see my cherished work
Rise from the summit of my temple towers
Into the free and sunlit air of heaven?

FIRST DWARF.

The iron is well forged. The hand is whole—
Deadened and numbed a little: that is all.

HEINRICH.

Off to the well with thee! The Nickelmann
Will cool thy fingers with his water-weeds.
[*To the* SECOND DWARF.]
Now take the rest thou'st earned, thou lazy imp,
And make the most of it. I'll comfort seek
In the reward that comes of honest effort.
[*He picks up the newly forged iron, sits, and examines it.*]
Ah, here's rare work for you! The kindly powers
Have crowned our labor with this good result.
I am content. Methinks I have cause to be,
Since, out of shapelessness, a shape has grown,
And, out of chaos, this rare masterpiece:
Nicely proportioned—here . . . above . . . below . . .
Just what was needed to complete the work.
[*The* FOURTH DWARF *clambers on to a stool and whispers in* HEINRICH'S *ear.*]
What art thou muttering, imp? Disturb me not,
Lest I should tie thy hands and feet together,
And clap a gag into thy chattering throat!
[DWARF *retreats in alarm.*]
What's out of joint in the great scheme? What's wrong?
What irks thee? Speak when thou art questioned, dwarf!
Never as now was I so filled with joy;
Never were heart and hand more surely one.
What art thou grumbling at? Am I not Master?
Wouldst thou, poor hireling, dare to vie with me?
Well—out with it! Thy meaning—Speak! Be plain!
[DWARF *returns and whispers.* HEINRICH *turns pale, sighs, rises, and angrily lays the iron on the anvil.*]
Then may the Devil end this work himself!
I'll grow potatoes, and plant cabbages.

I'll eat and drink and sleep, and then—I'll die!

[FIFTH DWARF *approaches the anvil.*]

Thou, fellow, do not dare to lay thy hand on 't!
Ay, burst with fury, an thou wilt. I care not.
And let thy hair stand straight on end—thy glance
Dart death. Thou rogue! Who yields but once to thee,
Or fails to hold thee tightly in his clutch,
Might just as well bow down and be thy slave,
And wait till, with thy club, thou end his pain!

[FIFTH DWARF *angrily shatters the iron on the anvil;* HEINRICH *grinds his teeth with rage.*]

Well, well! Run riot! No more work to-night.
A truce to duty. Get ye hence, ye dwarfs!
Should morning, as I hope, put fresh, new life
Into this frame of mine—I'll call ye back.
Go!—Work unbidden would avail me naught.

[*To* THIRD DWARF.]

Come—drop thy bellows, dwarf. With all thy might,
Thou'dst hardly heat me a new iron to-night.
Away! Away!

[*All the* DWARFS, *with the exception of the one with the crown, vanish through the door L.*]

And thou, crowned King, who only once shalt speak—
Why dost thou linger? Get thee gone, I say.
Thou wilt not speak to-day, nor yet to-morrow:
Heaven only knows if thou wilt ever speak!
My work! . . . My work! When will it end! . . . I'm tired!
I love thee not, sad twilight hour, that liest
Pressed 'twixt the dying day and growing night.
Thou wringest from my nerveless hand the hammer,
Yet bring'st me not the sleep, the dreamless sleep,
That gives men rest. A heart athirst for work
Knows it must wait, and wait in idleness:
And so—in pain—it waits . . . for the new day.
The sun, wrapped round in purple, slowly sinks
Into the depths . . . and leaves us here alone.
While we, who are used to light, look helpless on,
And, stripped of everything, must yield to night.

Rags are the coverlets that cloak our sleep.
At noon we're kings . . . at dusk we're only beggars.

[*He throws himself on a couch and lies dreaming, with wide-open eyes. A white mist comes in through the open door. When it disappears, the* NICKELMANN *is discovered leaning over the edge of the water-trough.*]

THE NICKELMANN.

Quorax! . . . Brekekekex! . . . So there he lies—
This Master Earth-Worm—in his mossgrown house.
He's deaf and blind, while crookback imps do creep
Like the grey mists upon the mountain-side.
Now they uplift their shadowy hands, and threaten!
Now they go wringing them, as though in pain!
He sleeps! He does not heed the moaning pines;
The low, malignant piping of the elves
That makes the oldest fir-trees quake and thrill,
And, like a hen that flaps her foolish wings,
Beat their own boughs against their quivering flanks . . . !
Now, he grows chiller, as the winter-grey
Searches the marrow in his bones. And still,
Even in sleep, he toils!
Give over, fool! Thou canst not fight with God!
'Twas God that raised thee up, to prove thy strength;
And now, since thou art weak, He casts thee down!

[HEINRICH *tosses about and moans in his sleep.*]

Vain is thy sacrifice. For Sin is Sin.
Thou hast not wrung from God the right to change
Evil to good—or wages give to guilt.
Thou'rt foul with stains. Thy garments reek with blood.
Now, call thou ne'er so loud, the gentle hand
That might have washed thee clean, thou'lt never see!
Black spirits gather in the hills and dales.
Soon in thine anguished ear the sound shall ring
Of the wild huntsmen and the baying hounds!
They know what game they hunt! . . . And now, behold!

The giant builders of the air upraise
Castles of cloud, with monstrous walls and towers.
Frowning and grim, they move against thy heights,
Eager to crush thy work, and thee, and all!

HEINRICH.

Help! Help! Rautendelein! An alp! I choke!

THE NICKELMANN.

She hears thee—and she comes—but brings no help!
Though she were Freya, and though thou wert Balder—
Though sun-tipped shafts did fill thy radiant quiver,
And ev'ry shaft that thou shouldst point went home—
Thou must be vanquished. Hear me!

A sunken bell in the deep mere lies,
Under the rocks and the rolling:
And it longs to rise—
In the sunlight again to be tolling!
The fishes swim in, and the fishes swim out,
As the old bell tosses, and rolls about.
It shudders and sways as they come and go,
And weeping is heard, and the sound of woe.
A muffled moan, and a throb of pain,
Answer the swirling flood—
For the mouth of the bell is choked with blood!
Woe, woe, to thee, man, when it tolls again!
Bim! . . . Boom!
The Lord save thee from thy doom!
Bim! . . . Boom!
Hark to the knell!
Death is the burden of that lost bell!
Bim! . . . Boom!
The Lord save thee from thy doom!
[*The* NICKELMANN *sinks into the well.*]

HEINRICH.

Help! Help! A nightmare chokes me! Help! Help! Help!
[*He awakes.*]
Where am I? . . . Am I living?
[*He rubs his eyes and looks round him.*]
No one here?

RAUTENDELEIN [*entering*].

I'm here! Did'st call?

HEINRICH.

Yes! Come! Come here to me.
Lay thy dear hand upon my forehead—so,
And let me stroke thy hair . . . and feel thy heart.
Come. Nearer. In thy train thou bring'st the scent
Of the fresh woods and rosemary. Ah, kiss me!
Kiss me!

RAUTENDELEIN.

What ails thee, dearest?

HEINRICH.

Nothing, nothing!
Give me a coverlet . . . I lay here chilled . . .
Too tired to work . . . My heart grew faint . . . and then
Dark powers of evil seemed to enter in . . .
Laid hold of me, possessed me, plagued me sore,
And tried to throttle me . . . But now I'm well.
Have thou no fear, child. I'm myself again!
Now let them come!

RAUTENDELEIN.

Who?

HEINRICH.

Why, my foes.

RAUTENDELEIN.

What foes?

HEINRICH.

My nameless enemies—ay, one and all!
I stand upon my feet, as once I stood,
Ready to brave them, though they filled my sleep
With crawling, creeping, cowardly terrors!

RAUTENDELEIN.

Thou'rt fevered, Heinrich!

HEINRICH.

Ay, 'tis chill to-night.
But—'tis no matter. Put thy arms around me.

RAUTENDELEIN.

Thou, dearest, dearest!

HEINRICH.

Tell me this, my child.
Dost trust in me?

RAUTENDELEIN.

Thou Balder! Hero! God!
I press my lips against the fair white brow
That overhangs the clear blue of thine eyes.

[*Pause.*]

HEINRICH.

So—I am all thou say'st? . . . I am thy Balder?
Make me believe it—make me know it, child!
Give my faint soul the rapturous joy it needs,
To nerve it to its task. For, as the hand,
Toiling with tong and hammer, on and on,
To hew the marble and to guide the chisel,
Now bungles here, now there, yet may not halt,

And nothing, small or great, dare leave to chance,
So do we ofttimes lose our passionate faith,
Feel the heart tighten, and the eyes grow dim,
Till, in the daily round of drudging work,
The clear projection of the soul doth vanish.
For, to preserve that Heaven-sent gift is hard.
No clamp have we, no chain, to hold it fast.
'Tis as the aura that surrounds a sun,
Impalpable. That lost, all's lost.
Defrauded now we stand, and tempted sore
To shirk the anguish that foreruns fruition.
What, in conception, seemed all ecstacy,
Now turns to sorrow. But—enough of this.
Still straight and steady doth the smoke ascend
From my poor human sacrifice to Heaven.
Should now a Hand on high reject my gift,
Why, it may do so. Then the priestly robe
Falls from my shoulder—by no act of mine;
While I, who erst upon the heights was set,
Must look my last on Horeb, and be dumb!
But now bring torches! Lights! And show thine art!
Enchantress! Fill the winecup! We will drink!
Ay, like the common herd of mortal men,
With resolute hands our fleeting joy we'll grip!
Our unsought leisure we will fill with life,
Not waste it, as the herd, in indolence.
We will have music!

RAUTENDELEIN.

O'er the hills I flew:
Now, as a cobweb, on the breezes drifting,
Now frolicing as a bee, or butterfly,
And darting hungrily from flower to flower.
From each and all, from every shrub and plant,
Each catch-fly, harebell, and forget-me-not,
I dragged the promise, and I forced the oath,
That bound them never to do harm to thee.
And so—the blackest elf, most bitter foe

To thee, so good and white, should vainly seek
To cut thy death-arrow!*

HEINRICH.

What is this arrow?
I know the spirit! . . . Yes, I know 't! . . . There came
A spirit to me once, in priestly garb,
Who, threat'ning, raised his hand, the while he raved
Of some such arrow that should pierce my heart.
Who'll speed the arrow from his bow, I say?
Who—who will dare?

RAUTENDELEIN.

Why, no one, dearest. No one.
Thou'rt proof against all ill, I say—thou'rt proof.
And now, blink but thine eye, or only nod,
And gentle strains shall upward float, as mist,
Hem thee about, and, with a wall of music,
Guard thee from call of man, and toll of bell:
Yea, mock at even Loki's mischievous arts.
Make the most trifling gesture with thy hand,
These rocks shall turn to vaulted palace-halls,
Earth-men unnumbered shall buzz round, and stand
Ready to deck the floor, the walls, the board!
Yet—since by dark, fierce foes we are beset,
Wilt thou not flee into the earth with me?
There we need fear no icy giant's breath—
There the vast halls shall shine with dazzling light——

HEINRICH.

Peace, child. No more. What were thy feast to me
So long as solemn, mute, and incomplete,
My work the hour awaits, wherein its voice
Shall loudly usher in the Feast of Feasts! . . .
I'll have one more good look at the great structure.
So shall new fetters bind me to it fast.

* It was an old belief that dangerous arrows were shot down from the air by elves.

Take thou a torch, and light me on my way.
Haste! Haste! . . . Since now I feel my nameless foes
Busy at work to do me injury—
Since now the fabric's menaced at the base—
'Tis meet the Master, too, should toil—not revel.
For, should success his weary labor crown,
The secret wonder stand at last revealed,
In gems and gold expressed, and ivory,
Even to the faintest, feeblest, of its tones—
His work should live, triumphant, through the ages!
'Tis imperfection that draws down the curse,
Which, could we brave it here, we'd make a mock of.
Ay, we will make a mock of 't!

[*He moves to the door and halts.*]

Well, child? . . .
Why dost thou linger! . . . Have I grieved thee?

RAUTENDELEIN.

No!
No! No!

HEINRICH.

What ails thee?

RAUTENDELEIN.

Nothing!

HEINRICH.

Thou poor soul!
I know what grieves thee.—Children, such as thou,
Run lightly after the bright butterflies,
And often, laughing, kill what most they love.
But I am not a butterfly. I am more.

RAUTENDELEIN.

And I? Am I a child? . . . No more than that?

HEINRICH.

Ay, truly, thou art more! . . . That to forget
Were to forget the brightness of my life.
The dew that glistened in thy shining eyes
Filled me with pain. And then I pained thee, too.
Come! 'Twas my tongue, not I, that hurt thee so.
My heart of hearts knows naught, save only love.
Nay—do not weep so. See—now I am armed;
Thou hast equipped me for the game anew.
Lo, thou hast filled my empty hands with gold;
Given me courage for one more last throw!
Now I can play with Heaven! . . . Ah, and I feel
So blessed, so wrapped in thy strange loveliness—
Yet, when I, wond'ring, seek to grasp it all,
I am baffled. For thy charm's unsearchable.
And then I feel how near joy's kin to pain—
Lead on! And light my path!

THE WOOD-SPRITE [*without*].

Holdrio!
Up! Up! Bestir yourselves! Plague o' the dawdlers!
The heathen temple must be laid in ashes!
Haste, reverend Sir! Haste, Master Barber, haste!
Here there is straw and pitch a-plenty. See!
The Master's cuddling his fair elfin bride—
And while he toys with her, naught else he heeds.

HEINRICH.

The deadly nightshade must have made him mad.
What art thou yelling in the night, thou rogue?
Beware!

THE WOOD-SPRITE [*defiantly*].

Of thee?

HEINRICH.

Ay, fool. Beware of me!
I know the way to manage such as thou,
I'll grab thee by thy beard, thou misshaped oaf;

Thou shalt be shorn and stripped, and when thou'rt tamed,
When thou hast learned to know who's master here,
I'll make thee work and slave for me—thou goat-shank!
What? . . . Neighing, eh? . . . Dost see this anvil, beast?
And, here, this hammer? It is hard enough
To beat thee to a jelly.

THE WOOD-SPRITE.

[*Turning his back on* HEINRICH *insolently.*]

Bah! Hammer away!
Many and many a zealot's flashing sword
Has tickled me, ere it was turned to splinters.
The iron on thy anvil's naught but clay,
And, like a cow's dug, at the touch it bursts.

HEINRICH.

We'll see, thou windbag, thou hobgoblin damned!
Wert thou as ancient as the Wester wood,
Or did thy power but match thy braggart tongue—
I'll have thee chained, and make thee fetch and carry,
Sweep, drudge, draw water, roll huge stones and rocks,
And shouldst thou loiter, beast, I'll have thee flayed!

RAUTENDELEIN.

Heinrich! He warns thee!

THE WOOD-SPRITE.

Ay! Go to! Go to!
'Twill be a mad game when they drag thee hence
And roast thee, like an ox! And I'll be by!
But now to find the brimstone, oil, and pitch,
Wherewith to make a bonfire that shall smoke
Till daylight shall be blotted out in darkness.

[*Exit.*]

[*Cries and murmurs of many voices heard from below, without.*]

The Wood-Sprite

RAUTENDELEIN.

Dost thou not hear them, Heinrich? Men are coming!
Hark to their boding cries! . . . They are for thee!
[*A stone flung from without strikes* RAUTENDELEIN.]
Help, grandmother!

HEINRICH.

So that is what was meant!
I dreamt a pack of hounds did hunt me down.
The hounds I hear. The hunt has not begun!
Their yelping, truly, could not come more pat.
For, though an angel had hung down from Heaven,
All lily-laden, and, with gentle sighs,
Entreated me to steadfastness,
He had convinced me less than those fierce cries
Of the great weight and purport of my mission.
Come one, come all! What's yours I guard for you!
I'll shield you from your selves! . . . That be my watchword!

[*Exit with hammer.*]

RAUTENDELEIN.

[*Alone and in excitement.*]
Help, help, Bush-Grandmother! Help, Nickelmann!
[*The* NICKELMANN *rises from the well.*]
Ah, my dear Nickelmann, I beg of you—
Bid water, quick, come streaming from the rocks,
Wave upon wave, and drive them all away!
Do! Do!

THE NICKELMANN.

Brekekekex! What shall I do?

RAUTENDELEIN.

Let thy wild waters sweep them to the abyss!

THE NICKELMANN.

I cannot.

RAUTENDELEIN.

But thou canst, good Nickelmann!

THE NICKELMANN.

And if I should—what good were that to me?
I have no cause to wish well to the Master.
He'd love to lord it over God and men.
'Twould suit me if the fools should strike him down!

RAUTENDELEIN.

Oh, help him—help! Or it will be too late!

THE NICKELMANN.

What wilt thou give me, dear?

RAUTENDELEIN.

I give thee?

THE NICKELMANN.

Yes.

RAUTENDELEIN.

Ah, what thou wilt!

THE NICKELMANN.

Oho! Brekekekex!
Then strip thy pretty gown from thy brown limbs,
Take off thy crimson shoon, thy dainty cap.
Be what thou art! Come down into my well—
I'll spirit thee a thousand leagues away.

RAUTENDELEIN.

Forsooth! How artfully he'd made his plans!
But now I tell thee once, and once for all;
Thou'dst better clear thy pate of all thy schemes.
For, shouldst thou live to thrice thy hoary age—
Shouldst thou grow old as Granny—shouldst thou forever
Prison me close in thine own oyster shells,
I would not look at thee!

THE NICKELMANN.

Then . . . he must die.

RAUTENDELEIN.

Thou liest! . . . I'm sure of 't. Thou liest! Hark!
Ah, well thou knowest his clear-sounding voice!
Dost think I do not see thee shrink in fear?

[*The* NICKELMANN *disappears in the well.*]

[*Enter* HEINRICH *in triumph, and flushed with the excitement of the strife. He laughs.*]

HEINRICH.

They came at me like hounds, and, even as hounds,
I drove them from me with the flaming brands!
Great boulders then I rolled upon their heads:
Some perished—others fled! Come—give me drink!
War cools the breast—'tis steeled by victory.
The warm blood rushes through my veins. Once more
My pulse throbs joyously. War does not tire.
War gives a man the strength of twenty men,
And hate and love makes new!

RAUTENDELEIN.

Here, Heinrich. Drink!

HEINRICH.

Yes, give it me, my child. I am athirst
For wine, and light, and love, and joy, and thee!

[*He drinks.*]

I drink to thee, thou airy elfin sprite!
And, with this drink, again I thee do wed.
Without thee, my invention would be clogged,
I were a prey to gloom—world-weariness.
My child, I entreat thee, do not fail me now.
Thou art the very pinion of my soul.
Fail not my soul!

RAUTENDELEIN.

Ah, do not thou fail me!

HEINRICH.

That God forbid! . . . Ho! Music!

RAUTENDELEIN.

Hither! Hither!
Come hither, little people! Elves and gnomes!
Come! Help us to make merry! Leave your homes!
Tune all your tiny pipes, and harps, and flutes,
[*Faint elfin music heard without.*]
And watch me dance responsive to your lutes!
With glowworms, gleaming emerald, lo, I deck
My waving tresses and my dainty neck.
So jeweled, and adorned with fairy light,
I'll make e'en Freya's necklace seem less bright!

HEINRICH [*interrupting*].

Be still! . . . Methought . . .

RAUTENDELEIN.

What?

HEINRICH.

Didst not hear it then?

RAUTENDELEIN.

Hear what?

HEINRICH.

Why—nothing.

RAUTENDELEIN.

Dearest, what is wrong?

HEINRICH.

I know not . . . But, commingling with thy music . . .
Methought I heard . . . a strain . . . a sound . . .

RAUTENDELEIN.

What sound?

HEINRICH.

A plaint . . . a tone . . . a long, long, buried tone . . .
No matter. It was nothing! Sit thou here!
Give me thy rose-red lips. From this fair cup
I'll drink forgetfulness!

[*They kiss. Long and ecstatic pause. Then* HEINRICH *and* RAUTENDELEIN *move, locked in each other's arms, through the doorway.*]

See! Deep and cool and monstrous yawns the gulf
That parts us from the world where mortals dwell.
I am a man. Canst understand me, child? . . .
Yonder I am at home . . . and yet a stranger—
Here I am strange . . . and yet I seem at home.
Canst understand?

RAUTENDELEIN.

Yes!

HEINRICH.

Yet thou eyest me
So wildly. Why?

RAUTENDELEIN.

I'm filled with dread—with horror!

HEINRICH.

With dread? Of what?

RAUTENDELEIN.

Of what? I cannot tell.

HEINRICH.

'Tis nothing. Let us rest.

[HEINRICH *leads* RAUTENDELEIN *towards the doorway in the rocks, L. He stops suddenly, and turns towards the open country.*]

Yet may the moon,
That hangs so chalky-white in yonder heavens,
Not shed the still light of her staring eyes

On what's below . . . may she not flood with brightness
The valley whence I rose to these lone heights!
For what lies hid beneath that pall of grey
I dare not gaze on! . . . Hark! Child! Didst hear nothing?

RAUTENDELEIN.

Nothing! And what thou saidst was dark to me!

HEINRICH.

What! Dost thou still not hear 't?

RAUTENDELEIN.

What should I hear?—
The night wind playing on the heath, I hear—
I hear the cawing of the carrion-kite—
I hear thee, strangely uttering strange, wild, words,
In tones that seem as though they were not thine!

HEINRICH.

There! There! Below . . . where shines the wicked moon.
Look! Yonder!—Where the light gleams on the waters!

RAUTENDELEIN.

Nothing I see! Nothing!

HEINRICH.

With thy gerfalcon eyes
Thou seest naught? Art blind? What drags its way
Slowly and painfully along . . . There . . . See!

RAUTENDELEIN.

Thy fancy cheats thee!

HEINRICH.

No! . . . It was no cheat,
As God shall pardon me! . . . Peace! Peace! I say!
Now it climbs over the great boulder, yonder—
Down by the footpath . . .

RAUTENDELEIN.

Heinrich! Do not look!
I'll close the doors and rescue thee by force!

HEINRICH.

No! Let me be! . . . I must look down! I will!

RAUTENDELEIN.

See—how the fleecy clouds whirl round and round,
As in a giant cauldron, 'mid the rocks!
Weak as thou art, beware! Go not too near!

HEINRICH.

I am not weak! . . 'Twas fancy. Now 'tis gone!

RAUTENDELEIN.

That's well! Now be once more our Lord and Master!
Shall wretched visions so undo thy strength?
No! Take thy hammer! Swing it high and wide! . . .

HEINRICH.

Dost thou not see them, where they climb and climb? . . .

RAUTENDELEIN.

Where?

HEINRICH.

There! . . . Now they have reached the rocky path . . .
Clad only in their little shirts they come!

RAUTENDELEIN.

Who come?

HEINRICH.

Two little lads, with bare, white feet.
They hold an urn between them . . . 'Tis so heavy!
Now one, and now the other, bends his knee . . .
His little, baby knee, to raise it up . . .

RAUTENDELEIN.

O, help him, mother—help him in his need!

HEINRICH.

A halo shines about their tiny heads . . .

RAUTENDELEIN.

Some will-o'-the-wisp!

HEINRICH.

No! . . . Clasp thy hands, and kneel!
Now . . . see . . . they're coming. Now . . now they are here!

[*He kneels, as the phantom forms of two* CHILDREN, *barefooted and clad only in their nightgowns, ascend from below and advance painfully towards him. Between them they carry a two-handled pitcher.*]

FIRST CHILD [*faintly*].

Father!

HEINRICH.

My child!

FIRST CHILD.

Our mother sends thee greeting.

HEINRICH.

Thanks, thanks, my dear, dear lad! All's well with her?

FIRST CHILD [*slowly and sadly*].

All's very well! . . .

[*The first faint tones of the sunken bell are heard from the depths.*]

HEINRICH.

What have you brought with you?

SECOND CHILD.

A pitcher.

HEINRICH.

Is't for me?

SECOND CHILD.

Yes, father dear.

HEINRICH.

What is there in the pitcher, my dear boy?

SECOND CHILD.

'Tis something salt! . . .

FIRST CHILD.

. . . And bitter!

SECOND CHILD.

Mother's tears!

HEINRICH.

Merciful God!

RAUTENDELEIN.

What art thou staring at?

HEINRICH.

At them . . . at them . .

RAUTENDELEIN.

At whom?

HEINRICH.

Hast thou not eyes?

At them!

[*To the* CHILDREN.]

Where is your mother? Speak, oh, speak!

FIRST CHILD.

Our mother?

HEINRICH.

Yes! Where is she!

SECOND CHILD.

With . . . the . . . lilies . . .
The water-lilies . . .

[*The bell tolls loudly.*]

HEINRICH.

Ah! The bell!

RAUTENDELEIN.

What bell?

HEINRICH.

The old, old, buried bell! . . . It rings! It tolls!
Who dealt this blow at me? . . . I will not listen!
Help! Help me! . . . Help! . . .

RAUTENDELEIN.

Come to your senses, Heinrich!

HEINRICH.

It tolls! . . . God help me! . . . Who has dealt this blow?
Hark, how it peals! Hark, how the buried tones
Swell louder, louder, till they sound as thunder,
Flooding the world! . . .

[*Turning to* RAUTENDELEIN.]

I hate thee! I abhor thee!
Back! Lest I strike thee! Hence! Thou witch! Thou trull!
Accursèd spirit! Curst be thou and I!
Curst be my work! . . And all! . . . Here! Here am I! . . .
I come! . . . I come! . . . Now may God pity me! . . .

[*He makes an effort, rises, stumbles, rises again, and tears himself away.*]

[*The* CHILDREN *have vanished.*]

RAUTENDELEIN.

Stay! Heinrich! Stay! . . . Woe's me! Lost! . . . Lost for aye!

CURTAIN.

Act Five.

The fir-clad glade seen in Act One.
Time: *Between midnight and dawn.*
Discovered: *Three* Elves, *resting near the well.*

First Elf.

The flame glows bright!

Second Elf.

The wind of sacrifice—
The red, red wind—blows in the vale!

Third Elf.

And lo,
The dark smoke from the pine-clad peak streams down
Into the gulf!

First Elf.

And, in the gulf, white clouds
Lie thickly gathered! From the misty sea
The wond'ring herds lift up their drowsy heads,
Lowing, impatient, for their sheltered stalls!

Second Elf.

A nightingale within the beechwood sang:
It sang and sobbed into the waning night—
Till, all a-quiver with responsive woe,
I sank upon the dewy grass and wept.

Third Elf.

'Tis strange! I lay upon a spider's web.
Between the blades of meadow-grass it hung,
All woven out of marvelous purple threads,

And softer than a royal shift it clung.
I lay, and rested, while the glistening dew
Flashed up at me from the green mead below:
And so, my heavy lids did gently droop,
Until at last I slept. When I awoke,
The light had faded in the distant west:
My bed had turned to grey. But, in the east,
Thick clouds went up, and up, that hid the moon,
While all the rocky ridge was covered o'er
With molten metal, glowing in the night.
And, in the bloody glare that downward streamed,
Methought—'twas strange—the fields did stir with life,
And whisp'rings, sighs, and voices low I heard
That filled the very air with wretchedness.
Ah, it was pitiful! . . . Then, quick, I hailed
A fire-fly, who his soft, green lamp had trimmed.
But on he flew. And so alone I lay,
Trembling with fear, and lost in wonderment.
Till, winged and gleaming as the dragon-fly,
The dearest, loveliest, of all the elves,
Who from afar his coming had proclaimed,
Rustled and fell into my waiting arms.
And, as we prattled in our cosy bed,
Warm tears were mingled with our kisses sweet,
And then he sighed, and sobbed, and pressed me tight,
Mourning for Balder . . . Balder, who was dead!

FIRST ELF [*rising*].

The flame glows bright!

SECOND ELF [*rising*].

'Tis Balder's funeral pyre!

THIRD ELF.

[*Who meanwhile has moved slowly to the edge of the wood.*]

Balder is dead! . . . I'm chill! [*She vanishes.*]

FIRST ELF.

A curse doth fall
Upon the land—as Balder's funeral pall!

[*Fog drifts across the glade. When it clears away the* ELVES *have vanished.*]

[*Enter* RAUTENDELEIN, *slowly and wearily descending from the hillside. She drags herself towards the well, halting to rest, sitting and rising again with an effort, on her way. When she speaks, her voice is faint and strange.*]

RAUTENDELEIN.

Whither? . . . Ah, whither? . . . I sat till late,
While the gnomes ran wild in my hall of state.
They brought me a red, red cup to drain—
And I drank it down, in pain.
For the wine I drank was blood!

. . . .

And, when I had drained the last red drop,
My heart in my bosom seemed to stop:
For a hand of iron had gripped the strings—
And still with a burning pain it wrings
The heart that I long to cool!

. . . . .

Then a crown on my wedding-board they laid—
All of rose-red coral and silver made.
As I set it upon my brow I sighed.
Woe's me! Now the Water-man's won his bride!
And I'll cool my burning heart!

. . . . .

Three apples fell into my lap last night,
Rose-red, and gold, and white—
Wedding-gifts from my water-sprite.
I ate the white apple, and white I grew:
I ate the gold apple, and rich I grew—
And the red one last I ate!

. . . .

Pale, white, and rosy-red,
A maiden sat—and she was dead.

Now, Water-man, unbar thy gate—
I bring thee home thy dead, dead, mate.
Deep down in the cold, damp, darkness, see—
With the silver fishes I come to thee . . .
Ah, my poor, burnt, aching, heart!

[*She descends slowly into the well.*]

[THE WOOD-SPRITE *enters from the wood, crosses to the well, and calls down.*]

THE WOOD-SPRITE.

Hey! Holdrio! Old frog-king! Up with thee!
Hey! Holdrio! Thou web-foot wight bewitched!
Dost thou not hear me, monster? Art asleep?
I say, come up!—and though beside thee lay
Thy fairest water-maid, and plucked thy beard,
I'd still say, leave thy reedy bed and come!
Thou'lt not repent it: for, by cock and pie,
What I've to tell thee is worth many a night
Spent in the arms of thy most lovesick sprite.

THE NICKELMANN [*from below*].

Brekekekex!

THE WOOD-SPRITE.

Up! Leave thy weedy pool!

THE NICKELMANN [*from below*]

I have no time. Begone, thou chattering fool!

THE WOOD-SPRITE.

What? What? Thou toad-i'-the-hole, thou hast no time
To spare from wallowing in thy mud and slime?
I say, I bring thee news. Didst thou not hear?
What I foretold's come true. I played the seer!
He's left her! . . . Now, an thou wilt but be spry,
Thou'lt haply catch thy wondrous butterfly!
A trifle jaded—ay, and something worn:
But, Lord, what care the Nickelmann and Faun?

Rare sport thou'lt find her, comrade, even now—
Ay, more than thou hadst bargained for, I'll vow.

THE NICKELMANN.

[*Rising from the well and blinking slyly.*]

Forsooth! . . . He's tired of her, the minx! And so
Thou'dst have me hang upon her skirts? . . . No, no!

THE WOOD-SPRITE.

What? . . . Hast thou wearied of this beauty, too?
Why, then—I would her whereabouts I knew!

THE NICKELMANN.

Go hunt for her!

THE WOOD-SPRITE.

I've sought her, like a dog:
Above—below, through mirk, and mist, and fog.
I've climbed where never mountain-goat had been,
And every marmot far and near I've seen.
Each falcon, glede, and finch, and rat, and snake,
I've asked for news. But none could answer make.
Woodmen I passed—around a fire they slept—
From them I stole a brand, and upward crept:
Till, grasping in my hand the burning wood,
At last before the lonely forge I stood.
And now the smoke of sacrifice ascends!
Loud roar the flames—each rafter cracks and bends!
The power the Master boasted once is fled:
For ever and for aye, 'tis past and dead!

THE NICKELMANN.

I know. I know. Thy news is old and stale.
Hast thou disturbed me with this idle tale?
Much more I'd tell thee—ay, who tolled the bell!
And how the clapper swung that rang the knell!
Hadst thou but seen, last night, as I did see,
What ne'er before had been, nor more shall be,

The hand of a dead woman, stark and cold,
Go groping for the bell that tossed and rolled.
And hadst thou heard the bell then make reply,
Peal upon peal send thundering to the sky—
Till, like the lioness that seeks her mate,
It thrilled the Master, even as the Voice of Fate!
I saw the woman—drowned. Her long, brown hair
Floated about her face: 'twas wan with care.
And alway, when her hand the bell had found,
The awful knell did loud, and louder, sound!
I'm old, and used to many a gruesome sight:
Yet horror seized me, and—I took to flight!
Hadst thou but seen, last night, what I have seen,
Thou wouldst not fret about thine elfin quean.
So, let her flit at will, from flower to flower:
I care not, I! Her charm has lost its power.

THE WOOD-SPRITE.

Ods bodikins! I care, though, for the maid.
So—each to his own taste. I want the jade.
And once I hold her panting in these arms,
'Tis little I shall reck of dead alarms!

THE NICKELMANN.

Quorax! Brekekekex! Oho! I see.
So that is still the flea that's biting thee?
Well—kill it, then. Go hunt her till thou'rt spent.
Yet, though a-hunting twice ten years thou went,
Thou shouldst not have her. 'Tis for me she sighs!
She has no liking for thy goaty eyes.
A hen-pecked Water-man, alack, I'm tied
By every whim and humor of my bride.
Now fare thee well. Thou'rt free, to come, or go:
But, as for me—'tis time I went below!

[*He disappears in the well.*]

THE WOOD-SPRITE [*calling down the well*].

So sure as all the stars in heaven do shine—
So sure as these stout shanks and horns are mine—

So sure as fishes swim and birds do fly—
A man-child in thy cradle soon shall lie!
Good-night. Sleep well! And now, be off to bed!
On! On! Through brush and brier! . . . The flea is dead!

[THE WOOD-SPRITE *skips off.*]

[OLD WITTIKIN *issues from the hut and takes down her shutters.*]

WITTIKIN.

'Twas time I rose. I sniff the morning air.
A pretty hurly there has been to-night.

[*A cock crows.*]

Oho! I thought so. Kikereekikee!
No need to give thyself such pains for me—
Thou noisy rogue—as if we did not know
What's coming, ere such cocks as thou did crow.
Thy hen another golden egg has laid?
And soon the sun shall warm the mirky glade?
Ay. Crow thy loudest, gossip! Sing and sing!
The dawn draws near. So strut thy fill and sing.
Another day's at hand. But—here 'tis dark . . .
Will no mad jack-o'-lantern give me a spark? . . .
I'll need more light to do my work, I wis . . .
And, as I live, my carbuncle I miss.

[*She fumbles in her pocket and produces a carbuncle.*]

Ah, here it is.

HEINRICH [*heard without*].

Rautendelein!

WITTIKIN.

Ay, call her!
She'll answer thee, I wager, thou poor brawler!

HEINRICH [*without*].

Rautendelein! I come. Dost thou not hear?

WITTIKIN.

Thou'lt need to call her louder, man, I fear.

[HEINRICH, *worn and weary, appears on the rocks above the hut. He is pale and in tatters. In his right hand he holds a heavy stone, ready to hurl it back into the depths.*]

HEINRICH.

Come, if you dare! Be it priest, or be it barber,
Sexton, or schoolmaster—I care not who!
The first who dares another step to take,
Shall fall and headlong plunge into the gulf!
'Twas ye who drove my wife to death, not I!
Vile rabble, witless wretches, beggars, rogues—
Who weeks together mumble idle prayers
For a lost penny! Yet, so base are ye,
That, where ye can, God's everlasting love
Ye cheat of ducats! . . . Liars! Hypocrites!
Like rocks ye are heaped about your nether-land,
Ringing it round, as with a dam of stone,
Lest haply God's own waters, rushing in,
Should flood your arid Hell with Paradise.
When shall the great destroyer wreck your dam?
I am not he . . . Alas! I am not the man!

[*He drops the stone and begins to ascend.*]

WITTIKIN.

That way is barred. So halt! And climb no more.

HEINRICH.

Woman, what burns up yonder?

WITTIKIN.

Nay, I know not.
Some man there was, I've heard, who built a thing,
Half church, half royal castle. Now—he's gone!
And, since he's left it, up it goes in flame.

[HEINRICH *makes a feeble effort to press upward.*]

Did I not tell thee, man, the road was barred?
He who would pass that way had need o' wings.
And thy wings have been broken.

HEINRICH.

Ah, broken or no,
I tell thee, woman, I must reach the peak!
What flames up yonder is my work—all mine!
Dost understand me? . . . I am he who built it.
And all I was, and all I grew to be,
Was spent on it . . . I can . . . I can . . . no more!

WITTIKIN.

[*Pause.*]

Halt here a while. The roads are still pitch-dark.
There is a bench. Sit down and rest.

HEINRICH.

I? . . . Rest? . . .
Though thou shouldst bid me sleep on silk and down,
That heap of ruins still would draw me on.
The kiss my mother—long she's joined the dust—
Did press years since upon my fevered brow,
Would bring no blessing to me now, no peace:
'Twould sting me like a wasp.

WITTIKIN.

Ay, so it would!
Wait here a bit, man. I will bring thee wine.
I've still a sup or two.

HEINRICH.

I must not wait.
Water! I thirst! I thirst!

WITTIKIN.

Go, draw, and drink!

[HEINRICH *moves to the well, draws, sits on the edge of the well, and drinks. A faint, sweet voice is heard from below, singing mournfully.*]

THE VOICE [*from below.*]

Heinrich, my sweetheart, I loved thee true.
Now thou art come to my well to woo.
Wilt thou not go?
Love is all woe—
Adieu! Adieu!

HEINRICH.

Woman, what voice was that? Speak—answer me!
What called and sang to me in such sad tones?
It murmured, "Heinrich!" . . . from the depths it came . . .
And then it softly sighed, "Adieu! Adieu!"
Who art thou, woman? And what place is this?
Am I awaking from some dream? . . . These rocks,
Thy hut, thyself, I seem to know ye all!
Yet all are strange. Can that which me befell
Have no more substance than a peal that sounds,
And, having sounded, dies away in silence?
Woman, who art thou?

WITTIKIN.

I? . . . And who art thou?

HEINRICH.

Dost ask me that? . . . Yes! Who am I? God wot!
How often have I prayed to Heaven to tell me! . . .
Who am I, God! . . . But Heaven itself is mute.
Yet this I do know: whatsoe'er I be,
Hero or weakling, demi-god or beast—
I am the outcast child of the bright Sun—
That longs for home: all helpless now, and maimed,
A bundle of sorrow, weeping for the Light
That stretches out its radiant arms in vain,
And yearns for me! . . . What dost thou there?

WITTIKIN.

Thou'lt learn that soon enough.

HEINRICH [*rising*].

Nay, I'll begone!
Now, with thy bloody lamplight, show me a way
Will lead me onward, upward, to the heights!
Once I am there, where erst I Master stood.
Lonely I'll live—thenceforth a hermit be—
Who neither rules, nor serves.

WITTIKIN.

I doubt it much!
What thou would'st seek up yonder is not that.

HEINRICH.

How canst thou know?

WITTIKIN.

We know what we do know.
They'd almost run thee down, my friend? . . . Ay, ay!
When life shines bright, like wolves ye men do act,
Rend it and torture it. But, when death comes,
No bolder are ye than a flock of sheep,
That trembles at the wolf. Ay, ay, 'tis true!
The herds that lead ye are but sorry carles
Who with the hounds do hunt and loudly yelp:
They do not set their hounds to hunt the wolf:
Nay, nay: their sheep they drive into its jaws! . . .
Thou'rt not much better than the other herds.
Thy bright life thou has torn and spurned away.
And when death fronted thee, thou wast not bold.

HEINRICH.

Ah, woman, list! . . . I know not how it came
That I did spurn and kill my clear bright life:
And, being a Master, did my task forsake,
Like a mere 'prentice, quaking at the sound
Of my own handiwork, the bell which I
Had blessed with speech. And yet 'tis true! Its voice
Rang out so loud from its great iron throat,

Waking the echoes of the topmost peaks,
That, as the threatening peal did rise and swell,
It shook my soul! . . . Yet I was still the Master!
Ere it had shattered me who moulded it,
With this same hand, that gave it form and life,
I should have crushed and ground it into atoms.

WITTIKIN.

What's past, is past: what's done, is done, for aye.
Thou'lt never win up to thy heights, I trow.
This much I'll grant: thou wast a sturdy shoot,
And mighty—yet too weak. Though thou wast called,
Thou'st not been chosen! . . . Come. Sit down beside me.

HEINRICH.

Woman! Farewell!

WITTIKIN.

Come here, and sit thee down.
What thou wouldst seek, by now's a heap of ashes.
Who lives, shall life pursue. But be thou sure,
Up yonder thou shalt find it nevermore.

HEINRICH.

Then let me perish here, where now I stand!

WITTIKIN.

Ay, so thou shalt. He who has flown so high,
Into the very Light, as thou hast flown,
Must perish, if he once fall back to Earth!

HEINRICH.

I know it. I have reached my journey's end.
So be it.

WITTIKIN.

Yes! Thou hast reached the end!

HEINRICH.

Then tell me—
Thou who dost seem to me so strangely wise—
Am I to die and never more set eyes
On what, with bleeding feet, I still must seek?
Thou dost not answer me? . . . Must I go hence—
Leave my deep night, and pass to deepest darkness—
Missing the afterglow of that lost light?
Shall I not see her once . . . ?

WITTIKIN.

Whom wouldst thou see?

HEINRICH.

I would see her. Whom else? . . . Dost not know that?

WITTIKIN.

Thou hast one wish! . . . It is thy last! . . . So—wish.

HEINRICH [*quickly*].

I have wished!

WITTIKIN.

Then thou shalt see her once again.

HEINRICH [*rising and ecstatically*].

Ah, mother! . . . Why I name thee thus, I know not . . .
Art thou so mighty? . . . Canst thou do so much? . . .
Once I was ready for the end, as now:
Half hoping, as each feeble breath I drew,
That it might be the last. But then she came—
And healing, like the breeze in early Spring,
Rushed through my sickly frame: and I grew well . . .
All of a sudden, now I feel so light,
That I could soar up to the heights again . . .

WITTIKIN.

Too late!

[HEINRICH *recoils in terror.*]

Thy heavy burdens weigh thee down:
Thy dead ones are too mighty for thee. See!
I place three goblets on the table. So.
The first I fill with white wine. In the next,
Red wine I pour: the last I fill with yellow.
Now, shouldst thou drain the first, thy vanished power
Shall be restored to thee. Shouldst drink the second,
Once more thou shalt behold the spirit bright
Whom thou hast lost. But an thou dost drink both,
Thou must drain down the last.

[*She turns to enter the hut. On the threshold she halts and utters the next words with solemn emphasis.*]

I say thou must!

[*She goes into the hut.*]

[HEINRICH *has listened to the preceding speech like a man dazed. As* OLD WITTIKIN *leaves him, he rouses himself and sinks on a bench.*]

HEINRICH.

Too late! . . . She said, "Too late!" . . . Now all is done!
O heart, that knowest all, as ne'er before:
Why dost thou question? . . . Messenger of Fate!
Thy fiat, as the axe, doth sharply fall,
Cutting the strand of life! . . . It is the end!
What's left is respite! . . . But I'll profit by 't.
Chill blows the wind from the abyss. The day
That yonder gleam so faintly doth forerun,
Piercing the sullen clouds with pale white shafts,
I shall not see. So many days I have lived:
Yet this one day I shall not live to see!

[*He raises the first goblet.*]

Come then, thou goblet, ere the horror come!
A dark drop glistens at the bottom. One!

A last one . . . Why, thou crone, hadst thou no more?
So be it! [*He drinks.*] And now to thee, thou second cup!
[*He raises the second goblet.*]
It was for thee that I did drain the first.
And, wert thou missing, thou delicious draught,
Whose fragrance tempts to madness, the carouse
Whereunto God has bid us in this world
Were all too poor, meseems—unworthy quite,
Of thee, who dost the festal board so honor.
Now I do thank thee—thus!
[*He drinks.*]
The drink is good.

[*A murmur as of æolian harps floats on the air while he drinks.*]

[RAUTENDELEIN *rises slowly from the well. She looks weary and sad. She sits on the edge of the well, combing her long flowing locks. Moonlight.* RAUTENDELEIN *is pale. She sings into vacancy. Her voice is faint*].

RAUTENDELEIN.

All, all alone, in the pale moon-shine,
I comb my golden hair,
Fair, fairest Rautendelein!
The mists are rising, the birds take flight,
The fires burn low in the weary night . . .

THE NICKELMANN [*from below*].

Rautendelein!

RAUTENDELEIN.

I'm coming!

THE NICKELMANN [*from below*].

Come at once!

RAUTENDELEIN.

Woe, woe, is me!
So tight I am clad,
A maid o' the well, bewitched and so sad!

THE NICKELMANN [*from below*].

Rautendelein!

RAUTENDELEIN.

I'm coming!

THE NICKELMANN [*from below*].

Come thou now!

RAUTENDELEIN.

I comb my hair in the moonlight clear,
And think of the sweetheart who loved me dear.
The blue-bells all are ringing.
Ring they of joy? Ring they of pain?
Blessing and bane—
Answers the song they are singing!
Now down I go, to my weedy well—
No more I may wait:
I must join my mate—
Farewell! Farewell!

[*She prepares to descend.*]

Who calls so softly?

HEINRICH.

I.

RAUTENDELEIN.

Who'rt thou?

HEINRICH.

Why—I.
Do but come nearer—ah, why wouldst thou fly?

RAUTENDELEIN.

I dare not come! . . . I know thee not. Away!
For him who speaks to me, I am doomed to slay.

HEINRICH.

Why torture me? Come. Lay thy hand in mine,
And thou shalt know me.

RAUTENDELEIN.

I have never known thee.

HEINRICH.

Thou know'st me not?

RAUTENDELEIN.

No!

HEINRICH.

Thou hast never seen me?

RAUTENDELEIN.

I cannot tell.

HEINRICH.

Then may God cast me off!
I never kissed thee till thy lips complained?

RAUTENDELEIN.

Never.

HEINRICH.

Thou'st never pressed thy lips to mine?

THE NICKELMANN [*from below*].

Rautendelein!

RAUTENDELEIN.

I'm coming!

THE NICKELMANN.

Come. I wait.

HEINRICH.

Who called to thee?

RAUTENDELEIN.

The Water-man—my mate!

HEINRICH.

Thou seest my agony—the pain and strife
That rend my soul, and eat away my life!
Ah, torture me no longer. Set me free!

RAUTENDELEIN.

Then, as thou wilt. But how?

HEINRICH.

Come close to me!

RAUTENDELEIN.

I cannot come.

HEINRICH.

Thou canst not?

RAUTENDELEIN.

No. I am bound.

HEINRICH.

By what?

RAUTENDELEIN [*retreating*].

I must begone to join the round,
A merry dance—and though my foot be sore,
Soon, as I dancing go, it burns no more.
Farewell! Farewell!

HEINRICH.

Where art thou? Stay, ah stay!

RAUTENDELEIN [*disappearing behind the well*].

Lost, lost, for ever!

Heinrich's Prayer

"Ah, torture me no longer. Set me free!"—Act V.

HEINRICH.

The goblet—quick, I say!
There . . there . . the goblet! . . . Magda? Thou? . . So pale! . . .
Give me the cup. Who brings it, I will hail
My truest friend.

RAUTENDELEIN [*reappearing*].

I bring it.

HEINRICH.

Be thou blessed.

RAUTENDELEIN.

Yes. I will do it. Leave the dead to rest!
[*She gives* HEINRICH *the goblet.*]

HEINRICH.

I feel thee near me, thou dear heart of mine!

RAUTENDELEIN [*retreating*].

Farewell! Farewell! I never can be thine!
Once I was thy true love—in May, in May—
Now all is past, for aye! . . .

HEINRICH.

For aye!

RAUTENDELEIN.

For aye!
Who sang thee soft to sleep with lullabies?
Who woke thee with enchanted melodies?

HEINRICH.

Who, who—but thou?

RAUTENDELEIN.

Who am I?

HEINRICH.

Rautendelein!

RAUTENDELEIN.

Who poured herself into thy veins, as wine?
Whom didst thou drive into the well to pine?

HEINRICH.

Thee, surely thee!

RAUTENDELEIN.

Who am I?

HEINRICH.

Rautendelein!

RAUTENDELEIN.

Farewell! Farewell! [*He drinks.*]

HEINRICH.

Nay: lead me gently down.
Now comes the night—the night that all would flee.
[RAUTENDELEIN *hastens to him, and clasps him about the knees.*]

RAUTENDELEIN [*exultingly*].

The Sun is coming!

HEINRICH.

The Sun!

RAUTENDELEIN [*half sobbing, half rejoicing*].

Heinrich!

HEINRICH.

Thanks!

RAUTENDELEIN.

[*Embracing* HEINRICH, *she presses her lips to his, and then gently lays him down as he dies.*]

Heinrich!

HEINRICH [*ecstatically*].

Hark! . . . 'Tis the music of the Sun-bells' song!
The Sun . . the Sun . . draws near! . . The Night is . . . long!

[*Dawn breaks. He dies.*]

THE END.